THE MIGRATION AND CONDITIONS OF IMMIGRANT LABOUR IN CEYLON 1880-1910

By

DHARMAPRIYA WESUMPERUMA

A thesis presented for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the

University of London

1974

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I was fortunate in having Dr. K. N. Chaudhuri of the School of Oriental and African studies as my supervisor during the course of the present study. I am most grateful to him for his guidance and criticisms from which I have benefitted greatly. Most of the research in the preparation of this work was done at the Public Record Office, the India Office Library, the British Museum Reading Room and the Newspaper Library (at Colindale), the Royal Commonwealth Society Library, and the libraries of the University of London. It is with a deep sense of gratitude that I record the generous assistance accorded to me by the staff of these institutes. My acknowledgements are also due to the staff of the Ceylon National Archives, the Ceylon Planters' Association, and the Ceylon Association in London. I am thankful to Dr. P. V. J. Jayasekera of the Peradeniya Campus, University of Ceylon for helping me to obtain some data from Ceylon. My sincere thanks are also due to Mr. M. D. C. Abayaratne for the care with which he prepared the maps. I would be failing in my duty if I do not recall with gratitude the initial encouragement given me to undertake historical research by Professor K. M. de Silva and Dr. M. W. Roberts, both of the Peradeniya Campus, University of Ceylon. My wife undertook the tedious task of typing all my drafts and also the final thesis. I am most grateful to her for the skill and the patience with which she has done this work. Finally, I must record my indebtedness to the Vidyodaya Campus of the University of Ceylon for giving me leave from my teaching duties and also providing me with financial assistance which made this study possible.

ABSTRACT

Immigrant labourers in Ceylon were wholly Indian and were predominantly plantation workers. The rapid expansion of plantation agriculture in our period, which was spearheaded by British capital and enterprise, took place under a supply of immigrant labour, which was on the whole favourable to the industry. The planters were tapping a free labour market in South India, for India did not impose restrictions on migration to Ceylon so long as the immigrants were on monthly contracts with the facility to return to their villages periodically. The planters preferred free as against indenture labour, for it opened up a chronic surplus of labour in a poverty-stricken condition to the free market forces of supply and demand. They, on the whole, concentrated on improving the methods of recruitment and transportation of labour so as to increase the inflow. The planters' problem was not so much the inadequacy of the labour supply as the problem of labour instability--of keeping the labourers on the estate for long periods. The coffee planter's technique was to withhold part of the wages until the end of the crop season. But the tea planter, with a year round demand for labour, required a longer hold. His technique was to place the labourer under a dead-weight of indebtedness to the estate. This was done by giving out indiscriminate cash advances, with a low wage scale where the wages were inadequate to work off the debt. The planters preferred to compete for labour on advances than on the wage scale. The cash advances, therefore, came to play the role which the wages play in a present-day labour market. With a low and a stagnant wage scale, the labourers turned to the advances to meet the gap between inadequate wages and the rising cost of living, but in the process got steeped

in indebtedness. Being familar with indebtedness in South India, the immigrant acquiesced. The system brought about little economic progress for the labourer. The migratory nature of the labour population and the kanganies' hold over the labour gangs contributed to the overall poverty. Government policy was one of non-interference into planter-labour industrial relations. However, in those other spheres in which the Colonial Government opted to interfere, viz., in providing transport facilities for the immigrants and also labour welfare schemes, labour conditions saw some improvement. But these measures did not bring about a striking progress in labour life partly because these schemes were not sufficiently far reaching in a period of rapid expansion of the immigrant labour population and more important, because of the overall impoverished and debt-ridden state of the labour community.

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ABBREVIATIONS

The following contractions are used in the footnotes below

AGA.	Assistant Government Agent.
AnR.	Annual Report
AR.	Administration Report
BISN Co.	British India Steam Navigation Company
CAR.	Ceylon Administration Report
Cey. BB.	Ceylon Blue Book
Cey. Lab. Com. 1908.	Ceylon Labour Commission of 1908
Cey. LC.	Ceylon Legislative Council
Cey. Sab. Lab. Com. 1915.	Ceylon (Sabaragamuwa) Labour Commission of 1915
Cey. SP.	Ceylon Sessional Papers
CGG.	Ceylon Government Gazette
CH.	Ceylon Hansard
CLC.	Ceylon Labour Commission in Trichinopoly
C.O.	Colonial Office
Col. Sec.	Colonial Secretary of Ceylon
C of C.	Chamber of Commerce, Ceylon
COO.	The Ceylon Observer, Overland Edition
COW.	The Ceylon Observer, Weekly Edition
CP.	Central Province, Ceylon
DHMC.	District Hospitals Mortality Commission
Dis. No.	Disposal Number
DPA	District Planters' Association, Ceylon
DPI	Director of Public Instructions, Ceylon
FPRPAC	Further Papers Relating to the Prevalence of Ancylostomiases in Ceylon
GA.	Government Agent.
Gov.	Governor of Ceylon

IEP.	India Emigration Proceedings
IOPB.	India Office: Parliamentary Branch
LRSRMP.	Land Revenue Settlement Report, Madras Presidency
MBRP.	Madras Board of Revenue Proceedings
MMPRI.	Moral and Material Progress Report of India
MPP.	Madras Public Proceedings
MRP.	Madras Revenue Proceedings
MWO.	Medical Wants Ordinance
NCP.	North Central Province, Ceylon
NP.	Northern Province, Ceylon
PAC.	Planters' Association of Ceylon
PCMO.	Principal Civil Medical Officer, Ceylon
PEITCC.	Papers relating to the Education of Indian Tamil Cooly Children employed on Ceylon estates
PPAC.	Proceedings of the Planters' Association of Ceylon
PRO. No.	Proceedings Number
PRPAC.	Papers Relating to the Prevalence of Ancylostomiases in Ceylon
RCEEC.	Report of the Commission on Elementary Education in Ceylon
Sec.	Secretary
SCC.	Silver Currency Commission
S of S.	Secretary of State for the Colonies
WCO.	The Weekly Ceylon Observer
WP.	Western Province, Ceylon
YPAC.	Year Book of the Planters' Association of Ceylon

In the case of all secondary books and articles cited in the footnotes, only the name of the author, the year of publication, and the relevant page or chapter number are given. The full details of these citations are included in the bibliography given at the end of the thesis. In the bibliography, the year of publication is given in parenthesis immediately after the author's name.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

ORIGINS OF INDIAN IMMIGRANT PLANTATION LABOUR IN CEYLON

Immigration from India to Ceylon was as old as the history of Ceylon itself. But the movement in the nineteenth century was sharply distinct in character from the earlier ones. While the earlier movements were primarily of political and cultural nature, the nineteenth century influx was predominantly an economic movement set off mainly by the need to provide wage labour for the coffee plantations. Beginning as a mere trickle in the fourth decade of the nineteenth century, this agricultural labour migration soon gathered momentum and assumed the proportion of a major flood. For almost a century the stream never completely ran dry. Finally, when it did run dry it was due to the policy of the Government of India in the 1930^{s} which prohibited further emigration to Ceylon from India. The quantitative proportion of the stream narrowed and broadened each year depending largely on the economic "pull" factors in Ceylon and the economic "push" factors in India. In this chapter we will look into these two sets of factors as they operated during those decades of the mid-nineteenth century which saw the origins of Indian plantation labour immigration to Ceylon.

1. The growth of capitalist plantation agriculture in nineteenth century Ceylon

The "pull" from Ceylon came about due to the radical economic changes which took place in the Island during the nineteenth century—changes which eventually resulted in creating a dualistic economy in the Island. From about the 1830^{s} a capitalist economy began to grow rapidly

in Ceylon.[1] It is interesting that this process took place in the heart of the Island where the traditional subsistence economy prevailed in its most unmixed form--namely the Central or the Kandyan regions of Ceylon. The Kandyan peasant lived within a typically traditional socio-economic framework. Living in the lower terrain of the hill country, they cultivated rice mainly for their subsistence and had little, if any, cash transactions. They bartered most of their produce with their own countrymen and lived mostly in virtually self-sufficient villages, with few necessities other than the basic ones. An occupational caste structure with a fairly rigid social stratification characterised their social organisations. Considering the land-population ratio the region was not densely populated.

In the 1840[s], when coffee plantations began to emerge on the scene, the Kandyan regions were being slowly opened up to outside influences. For nearly three centuries up to 1815, during which time the socio-economic fabric of the Kingdom took shape, the Kandyans held their own against intermittent military expeditions directed against them by the European powers who occupied the maritime regions of the Island.[2] During these centuries the Kingdom was by no means a "closed polity".[3] The South Indian Nayakkar rulers who ascended the Kandyan throne in the seventeenth century brought numerous South Indian cultural, economic, and political influences into the region. The European domination in

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1. I. H. Vanden Driesen, 1953a and 1953b.
2. From the end of the sixteenth century, the maritime regions of the Island were ruled by the Portugese (to 1658), the Dutch (1658-1796), and the British (from 1796).
3. The Kandyan Kingdom originated in the late fifteenth century. After the maritime belt of the Island fell under European rule from the sixteenth century, the Kandyan Kingdom remained as the bastion of Sinhalese independence till its final conquest by the British in 1815.

the Maritime areas since the sixteenth century, especially their persistant military excursions into the Kandyan regions, introduced certain foreign elements. But these consitituted very limited outside infiltrations, mere trickles with hardly any significant impact on the basic structure. It was only after the British conquest of the Kandyan Kingdom in 1815, especially with the stabilization of British power after the crushing of the independence revolts of 1818, that outside influences began to penetrate in any effective manner.[4] Even thereafter little socio-economic infiltration of European Imperialism took place up to about 1835. The only notable changes up to this time were three-fold. Firstly, the imposition of a unified administrative and legal superstructure manned by British officials over the traditional Kandyan Sinhalese officialdom. In this process the political power of the latter were greatly mutilated, thereby ensuring for the British the political hegemony and stability so necessary for economic infiltration. The second significant reform during this period was the abolition of Rajakariya-- the traditional compulsory gratuitious services which every inhabitant of the Kandyan region had to perform.[5] Rajakariya being a strong semi-feudal tie, its abolition had the effect of loosening the traditional bonds. However, its effects did not immediately bring about any radical change in the socio-economic behaviour of the people. Thirdly, the construction of the Colombo-Kandy road in the 1820[s] opened up the central hill capital for strategic and administrative

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4. On the British conquest of the Kandyan Kingdom and the suppression of the independence revolts of 1818, see Colvin R. de Silva, 1942, chaps. 5 and 6.

5. The system of Rajakariya was two-fold. First, all inhabitants who held land from the king, the nobles, and the priests had to perform certain services in return for the tenure of land. Secondly, independent of the land holdings, all inhabitants had to perform gratuitious services by way of construction and repair of the village roads, bridges, and irrigation works.

purposes and prepared the way for subsequent economic infiltration.[6] In spite of these changes the peasant still lived in a traditional setting, except for the economic emancipation of a sort received with the abolition of Rajakariya. The abolition was effected primarily in the hope that the Rajakariya-freed peasant would readily avail himself of wage-labour in the event of a labour market coming up in the wake of British economic enterprises in the Kandyan areas.

British private capital and enterprise began to flow into the Kandyan areas from about 1835 with the rapid growth of coffee plantations. This was a direct result of the economic factors at work within the British Empire at this time. The most formidable coffee supplier within the Empire--the British West Indian colonies--found the ground under its economic feet disastrously cut, firstly, with the abolition of slavery within the Empire which deprived the West Indian coffee planters of their source of cheap labour, and secondly, by the gradual revision of the Mercantalist system of tariff protection which had hitherto accorded preferential treatment to the West Indian colonies --a revision which eventually culminated in the equalisation of the British custom tariff on West and East Indian coffee entering Britain.[7] The decline of West Indian coffee plantations coincided with a period of increased demand for coffee in Europe.[8] British private capital

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6. The Kandyan Kingdom was a thickly forested and mountainous country, a veritable natural fortress. It was this geographical situation which protected and nurtured the Kandyan seclution, independence, and patriotism for several centuries against Portugese, Dutch, and British invasions from the maritime areas of the Island.

7. The import duty on coffee in England stood at 6^d per pound for West Indian and 9^d per pound for East Indian coffee. In 1835 the import duty was equalised at 6^d per pound.

8. L. A. Mills, 1933, p. 227.
I. H. Vanden Driesen, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, London, 1954, p. 20. Vanden Driesen gives the following statistics on coffee imports to England from West Indies and Ceylon (weight in pounds).

Year	West Indies	Ceylon
1827	29,419,593	1,792,448
1837	15,577,888	6,756,848
1847	5,259,449	19,475,904

sought new land for investment. Politically stable, administratively unified, climatically suited, and hopeful of obtaining Rajakariya-freed labour, Ceylon appeared an appropriate land for investment on coffee. Consequently, coffee was the dominant economic influence from about 1835 to about 1880.[9] It introduced to Ceylon a plantation economy based on a cash crop and linked Ceylon closely to the world market. Capital, land, and labour came to be assembled and organised under modern enterprise.

The growth of capitalist enterprises in Ceylon was part of a broader transformation that was taking place in the nature of the European economic activities throughout their colonies in the East. Since the arrival of the European powers in the East in the sixteenth century their interests were confined mainly to commercial activities, purchasing the tropical products produced by the indigenous people. When in the nineteenth century there grew an increasing demand for the existing tropical products the interests of the Imperial powers were gradually extended from purely commercial activities to the direct production of export commodities. Thus, the colonies began to experience the growth of plantations and mines, organised, financed, and managed by the Europeans. The problems of obtaining capital, land, and labour which this new type of economic activities brought about became remarkably alike in most of the European colonies in the East. A study of any aspect of these problems in any one of the colonies, broadly speaking, reveals similarities with the rest of South Asia.

In the process of the growth of the plantation sector in nineteenth century Ceylon, capital, and enterprise came at first from the British officials in Ceylon and subsequently from the British entrepreneurs.[10] The early plantations were established in the regions

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9. For the origins and the growth of the coffee industry in Ceylon, see I. H. Vanden Driesen, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, London, 1954.

10. K. M. de Silva, 1964a, pp. 28-29.

neighbouring the peasant villages. Consequently, there was encroachment of the village waste land and chenas traditionally utilized by the peasants.[11] The villages became hemmed in amidst plantations. However, it was soon discovered that coffee grew best on cleared forest land rather than on abandoned chena land, particularly on land situated above 1700 ft. contour.[12] The Government was willing to sell these forest lands at a nominal rate of five shillings an acre to the planters. The entrepreneurs' main problem regarding land was the need for clear freehold legal titles to the holdings they bought so as to ensure the security of their investments. This need was fulfilled by the Government by the enactment of the Land Ordinances No. 12 of 1840 and No. 9 of 1841.[13] The "coffee mania" of the early 1840s saw vast extents of Crown forest land being sold to the planters and land speculators. The large-scale sale of Crown land continued during the succeeding decades with the progress of the coffee industry.

2. The labour problem and the beginnings of labour immigration

The operations in the plantation economy naturally created a heavy demand for plantation workers. Labour was required for felling and clearing forests and setting up plantations. Once the plantations were set up, there was a heavy demand for labour for picking and transporting of coffee. During the 1830s there was much sanguine hopes that the Kandyan peasant could be persuaded to sell his labour. It was the desire to obtain labour from among the Kandyan peasants towards the creation of a plantation economy which prompted Colebrooke to recommend

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11. Chenas were patches of jungle land which the peasants cleared for themselves to cultivate dry grains periodically. Once the soil was exhausted after several harvests they shifted to other jungle patches, and the abandoned chenas were re-cultivated after a lapse of about two or three years. This type of shifting cultivation was undertaken by the peasants in addition to the cultivation of their paddy fields.

12. K. M. de Silva, 1964b, p. 152.

13. K. M. de Silva, 1964a.
I. H. Vanden Driesen, 1957.

the abolition of Rajakariya. Colebrooke's line of thinking was that once the traditional socio-economic ties of the Kandyan society are loosened, the Kandyan peasantry could be appended to the money economy which the British private capital would create and that the Kandyan peasantry while providing wage labour would also provide a valuable market for British manufactures. Colebrooke was, in fact, recommending for Ceylon the new British attitude which was currently taking shape towards forced labour in the various British colonies. At the time the Europeans came to the East they found a tradition of unfree labour, utilized mainly for building and maintaining such public works as roads and irrigation schemes well established. These systems ranged from outright slavery to the attachment of bonded workers and differed from country to country. While the traditional systems of compulsory labour served many worthwhile purposes, especially in building and maintaining public works and irrigation schemes, these systems seldom proved useful as a means of achieving the economic objectives of the nineteenth century colonial powers. It was gradually realised that a new approach to the problem of labour was necessary in order to attain their economic objectives. A new solution became all the more necessary because of the new type of economic activities, namely, the European-financed and European-managed plantations and mines. Throughout the Empire, systems of forced labour were either adapted or totally abolished in the hope that indigenous people would come forward for wage labour.

In Ceylon, during the early stage of the coffee industry in the 1830^{s} when there were only a few plantations, the Sinhalese in some areas did sell their labour. There were instances when the Kandyans as well as the low-country Sinhalese worked on plantations.[14] But this

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14. M. W. Roberts, 1966a, pp. 1-2.

proved to be only a passing episode. Soon they withdrew into their traditional socio-economic framework and confined themselves to engaging in "piece work" such as contract for weeding and felling forests. They did not respond to the demand for regular work on estates. The British planters were confronted with the acute problem of a shortage of labour. They found it hard to get even the poorest strata in the countryside to accept regular wage employment on the estates.[15]

This was not a problem peculiar to British Ceylon. Virtually all European powers were confronted with this problem in their efforts at economic penetration and exploitation of their colonies. During the age of Mercantalism the problem was solved with African slave-labour. The abolition of slavery was a very important factor creating a heavy demand for new sources of labour; for it appeared that after their emancipation the former slaves were not prepared to work on plantations and mines as wage labourers.[16] This situation was best illustrated in the British West Indian colonies. When slavery was abolished in the British Empire in 1833, the emancipated Negro slaves of the British West Indies refused to work as wage labourers on the coffee and sugar plantations and migrated to jungle areas to eke out an existence as peasants. The planters were left with a steadily diminishing labour force. Similar problems occurred in the French and Dutch colonies when slavery was abolished in their respective Empires in 1861 and in 1868.

Colonies in which a shortage of labour took place can be grouped under two theoretical models.[17] First, the problem came up in situations where the location of natural resources required the mines and plantations to be set up in countries which had sparse population

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15. Ibid.

16. N. Gangulee, 1947, p. 21.
Hugh Tinker, 1974, pp. 2, 18.

17. H. Myint, 1965, chap. 4.

in relation to the available resources. This was the situation in Assam and some of the African colonies. Secondly, the problem of procuring labour arose in the case of countries which were well populated; but their indigenous people would not come forward to work on plantations either because the peasants found the cultivation of cash crops more attractive or because they had no need to labour for wages, living as they did in a virtually self-sufficient traditional socio-economic frame-work. By and large, this was the situation in countries like Burma, Malaya, and Ceylon.

Efforts to remedy the labour shortage were attempted in two ways. In situations where the enterprises came up in the sparsely populated regions like in some of the African colonies, the 'migrant labour' system was experimented with, with considerable success. In analysing the system Professor Myint points out that

> Under this system, those who come to work in the mines and plantations still retained a foothold in the subsistence economy. They regarded their wage-earning activity not as a permanent full-time employment but as a periodical spare-time activity to earn a certain amount of money in addition to their claims on the subsistence economy.18

In the case of other colonies like Burma, Malaya, and Ceylon where migrant labour of the African type was not available on a sufficient scale or where the peasants would not come forward for wage labour, a different solution was adopted. This was to import immigrant labour on a large-scale from the relatively over-populated regions of either India or China.

Just as the African coast supplied slave-labour for the economic development of the First British Empire, India and China turned out to be the greatest reservoir of wage-labour for the economic progress of the Second British Empire. To Ceylon, Malaya, Burma, West Indies, Fiji, and East Africa wage-labour were engaged from either India or China to work on mines, plantations, railway projects, and other public works.

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18. Ibid., p. 58.

It is said,

> Indeed, the immigrant labour from India and China was recruited on so large a scale that it has been said that these two countries, together with Britain, were the 'three mother countries' of the British Empire.19

It is interesting to analyse the curious factors which prompted one set of the British colonial people, to hire their labour even in distant countries away from their homeland with all the attendent risks of long voyages and an uncertain future, while the indigenous people living in the country of the location of the natural resources refused to work on the plantations and mines almost bordering their villages. In analysing the reasons in relation to the Kandyan regions in Ceylon much has been said of the conservatism of the Kandyan Sinhalese and their laziness and indolence and the relative capacity for hard work in the South Indians.[20] This explanation originated with the British officials and the British planters of Ceylon in the mid-nineteenth century. Once propounded, the theory remained an article of faith among the British circles in Ceylon throughout the colonial rule.[21] Conservatism was no less conspicuous among the South Indians than among any other indigenous people in the Empire. In fact, in comparison with the Sinhalese, some of the traditional ideas and values were much stronger in South India than in Ceylon. For instance, nowhere in Ceylon was the caste structure as rigid as in South India. As for the theory of laziness and the indolence of the Sinhalese, it is worth noting that much of hard work connected with the opening up of the plantations--the clearing of forests and transporting commodities were performed by the Sinhalese. Besides, the

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19. H. Myint, 1965, p. 63.
A large migration of Chinese labour took place in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries mainly from the Kwantung province of southern China to particularly West Indies, Australia, South Africa and Malaya. On Chinese labour emigration within the British Empire, see P. C. Campbell, 1971.

20. M. W. Roberts, 1966a, p. 2.

21. Ibid.

accounts of the ill-fed and the disease-stricken nature of the South Indian immigrants recorded by the contemporaries, and more significantly, the high rate of mortality among the immigrants of the mid-nineteenth century do not speak of them as a race with an above the average degree of physical endurance in comparison with the other indigenous people of the British colonies.[22]

Basically the explanation is economic and partly social. The immigrants (South Indians) and the indigenous people (Sinhalese, Burmese, Malayans) both lived in a peasant society, characterised by a subsistence-economy but in two vastly different economic situations. The economic situation of the great majority of the South Indians compared gravely ill with the indigenous people of the recipient countries. In the case of the latter there was no heavy over-crowding on land and the people were, by and large, self-sufficient in their basic necessities. In South India a considerable section of the population lived at a minimum level of subsistence. The interplay of several economic factors during the preceding century or so had driven the majority of, especially the low-caste, South Indians to the fringe of economic peril. This provided the main "push" factor which prompted them to undertake the dangers of the long journeys and the uncertainties of the future in spite of their innate conservatism. This economic "push" factor was absent in the case of the majority of the Kandyans. Unlike the South Indians, the Kandyans were nowhere near economic peril though in a stagnant economy and with a low standard of living. Their necessities were few and in these they were virtually self-sufficient. The climate was relatively favourable and the soil fertile; natural calamities like persistent famines and epidemics, which frequently devastated South India in the nineteenth century and endangered the economic conditions of the people there, rarely

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22. K. M. de Silva, 1965, p. 300.
I. H. Vanden Driesen, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, London, 1954, pp. 186-187.

occurred in the Kandyan regions. Economically the Kandyans were in a situation which enabled them to live their traditional form of economic life within the traditional economic framework. There was no heavy population pressure and no large surplus of unemployed man-power. Dr. Roberts points out that in the Kandyan areas the people had no need for wage labour. To quote him

> ... none who were so poverty stricken as to tie themselves to the wage-strings of, what was to them, a rather strange person, the white planter.23

Problems of land throw valuable light on at least some aspects of the wage-labour problem in Ceylon. The traditional system of land holdings assured those of the agricultural classes a claim over some piece of land, however small his share. Even if one's hereditary land was inadequate, the practice of chena cultivation gave the peasants the opportunity to undertake extensive cultivation on plots of land cleared from the forest. Those who belonged to non-agricultural castes had their hereditary occupations since caste stratification was of occupational origin. The availability of land to subsist on was a significant factor which dissuaded the Kandyan peasants from going to the estates as wage labourers. This becomes clear when one realises that at times when some section of the peasantry lost their land holdings either due to mortgage or due to forfeiture by the Government for the default of tax payments, they drifted to the estates in search of employment. This took place in some Kandyan areas in the 1880s.[24] However, there was no large-scale displacement of the peasantry from their traditional lands as in the period of the Enclosure Movement in England when the uprooted English farmers had no choice but to drift to industrial areas in search of employment. This raises the interesting question as to how the Kandyan

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23. M. W. Roberts, 1966a, p. 1.

24. D. Wesumperuma, 1967, p. 142.

peasants retained their land in the wake of the plantation surge in the Kandyan regions. Recent research has shown that the growth of plantations in the Kandyan regions did not result in the creation of a landless class in that region and that the effect of the British land policies in Ceylon resulted mainly in preventing the further expansion of the villages.[25] It is not correct to conclude that all Kandyans possessed land. There was a landless section. But in the Kandyan economy they worked not as agricultural labourers as did the great majority of the landless agricultural population in South India, but as sharecroppers. Although the sharecropper did manual labour, he was distinct from an agricultural labourer in that he did his manual work for himself and was under no one's command like the agricultural labourer.

Apart from the general economic situation, the availability of land, and the absence of agricultural labour castes, several other factors militated against the peasants going to the estates for wage labour. The Kandyans regarded manual work, performed under the supervision and control of another person, as a most degrading stigma.[26] They detested the arbitrary hand of a foreign employer. Caste conciousness contributed to strengthen their antipathy to hired labour. They depised hired labour as mere servitude. It is possible that the bitter memories of the way in which the system of compulsory labour (Rajakariya) was utilized by the British to serve imperial interests in Ceylon played some part in shaping this attitude. There was a sense of hostility to the presence of estates. In fact, the spread of plantations seems to have driven the peasants away from the planters. The hostility was the result of several factors. The Kandyans resented the loss of their village wasteland and chenas to the estates. The British superimposed freehold property rights on a society which knew no other than

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25. L.R.Jayawardena, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Cambridge, 1963.
26. I. H. Vanden Driesen, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, London, 1954.

traditional concepts of land holding. The peasants resented the introduction of alien concepts of land ownership by the Government in the interest of the planters. Extention of villages was hampered. Kandyans regarded the planters as having intruded on to their privacy. Further, though some Kandyans did accept wage labour in the early years of coffee planting in Ceylon, the treatment meted out to the labourers by the early planters made them reluctant to return to work. The able and the most notable Colonial Secretary in Ceylon during the nineteenth century, Sir James E. Tennent, held that the Kandyans were put off by the brutalities of the superintendents and by the non-payment of wages.[27] The level of wages itself was not attractive. The planters wanted cheap labour and offered rates which the Kandyans would not accept. It was only in times of very acute shortage of labour would the planter try to experiment with the wage scale.

Besides, the Kandyans of mid-nineteenth century did not have any great need for cash. Living in a traditional set-up, there was little use of money. The taxes were mostly paid in kind. While there was no general land tax in Ceylon like in India, the peasants had to pay two major direct taxes--the paddy tax and the road tax. In the method of collection, both taxes worked on the same principle where the payment could be made either in cash or in kind. In case of the paddy tax, which roughly approximated one-tenth of the produce of the peasant paddy fields, a system of compulsory commutation of the tax into money payments was introduced only as late as 1878.[28] Even then, the system was only gradually extended in the Kandyan regions and it was rigorously implemented only for a relatively short period of about five years during the early 1880s. The tax itself was eventually abolished in 1892. The road tax introduced in 1848 obliged the adult males between ages of

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27. M. W. Roberts, 1966a, p. 1.
E. F. C. Ludowyk, 1966, p. 66.

28. D. Wesumperuma, 1969.

18 and 55 years to pay three shillings per year for the upkeep of roads, but the people were given the option of commuting the tax in manual labour for six days a year on the roads.[29]

The spread of plantations in some ways, in some areas at least, helped the peasants to improve their economic position without tieing themselves to the wage strings on the estates. The growth of plantations opened up subsidiary avenues of income. These became more attractive to the peasants than regular work on the estates. Besides, the peasants themselves began to grow coffee on their own plots of lands as a spare-time activity in addition to their normal agricultural work. When the taxes were commuted for money payments, it was mainly with the earnings of "peasant coffee" that the peasants paid their taxes.[30]

Even if the Kandyans were ready to accept regular work on the estates, it is doubtful whether Kandyan areas had a sufficient population base to provide an adequate labour force for the plantations. The Kandyans, when they did come for work, were ready only to perform casual labour which would enable them to get back to their villages by night.[31] They were not willing to reside on the estates. The planters, on the other hand, wanted a stable and a certain supply of labour, resident on the estates at least during the heavy coffee picking season. To the planters the small number of Kandyans who came for work appeared as too precarious a supply of labour.

When threatened with labour shortage, the trend of the day in the British colonies was to turn to India. The planters in Ceylon too fell in line. It was to their advantage that Ceylon lay so close to South India. While the demand on the plantations provided the "pull" factor, the economic situation of the agricultural labourers and the

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29. T. G. I. B. Munasinghe, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, London, 1972, pp. 89-90.

30. D. Wesumperuma. 1967, pp. 134-135.

31. See below, pp. 145-147.

small-scale peasants in South India explains the "push" factor.[32] Economically there were wide disparities and regional varations in South India. However, it is possible to disentangle certain broad trends in the economic history of South India during the nineteenth century, most of which point towards an economic deterioration.

A primary factor relevant to our study is the presence of a considerable class of agricultural labourers in South India during the nineteenth century. The South Indian agricultural labourers present an extremely wide variety of types. They have been differently defined by various writers on the subject. Broadly, this population embraces those sections of the society whose major source of livelihood was working in the lands of others. They were either landless or had only minute holdings too small for their subsistence and therefore had to offer their manual labour to make a living. They may have been either fully employed, under employed, or unemployed for part of the year depending on the nature and the extent of the demand and supply of labour in the agricultural sector.

The origins of the agricultural labour population in India, the growth rate of the class, and the relative impact of the factors which shaped their fortunes during the nineteenth century have aroused much controversy among the writers on modern Indian economic history. This debate, which still continues, is of importance to us in that it reveals some aspects vitally relevant to us on the fortunes of the Indian agrarian society during the nineteenth century--the source from which the immigrant plantation labourers were drawn. In the following analysis we will confine our attention to these crucial aspects.

Recent research has demolished the traditional theory that the growth of a landless agricultural labour population in South India was

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32. Immigrant labourers to Ceylon were drawn mainly from these two groups of the people in South India. See below, pp. 109-111.

predominently a nineteenth century phenomenon.[33] Even in pre-British days there appears to have been a sizable group of people in South India who performed agricultural labour--people who belonged to several castes such as Palli, Pallan, Paraiyan, and Cheruman, which were in fact agricultural labour castes.[34] These agricultural labourers were landless because economic and social factors debarred the low caste labourers acquiring land. Evidence as regards the size of this class in early nineteenth century is far from conclusive. As regards South India, the most recent estimate places the size of this class to approximately 10-15 per cent of the total population at the beginning of the nineteenth century.[35]

During the nineteenth century the South Indian agricultural labour population seems to have increased both in its absolute numbers as well as in its proportion to the total agricultural population. First, the natural growth of population in India in the nineteenth century contributed its share.[36] Though during famines and epidemics, so frequent in nineteenth century India, the population decreased, the recovery of

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33. The traditional theory supported by most of the Indian writers holds that the landless agricultural labourers in India were a creation of British rule. They argue that in pre-British India there was no significant class of landless labourers; that the people lived a corporate life in self-sufficient villages of peasant proprietors and village artisans; that the socio-economic changes introduced by the British in the nineteenth century destroyed the basis of the self-sufficient village economy and left the arisans and the peasants dispossesed of their handicraft industries and lands; that these groups had no choice but to resort to agricultural labour for their livelihood. (For a clear presentation of this theory, see, S. J. Patel, 1952). The basis of the above theory has been contested by a more recent writer, Dharma Kumar. She contends that "... there was a need for agricultural labourers even before the impact of the British rule was felt" and that in pre-nineteenth century India there was sizable group of landless agricultural labourers; that the changes during the nineteenth century "... could hardly be regarded as a radical transformation of the agrarian economy" (Dharma Kumar, 1965, p. 182); that the growth rate of the landless agricultural labour population was a slow one. (Ibid., chaps. I-VI and X-XI). See also, Morris D. Morris, 1966, pp. 185-209.

34. Dharma Kumar, 1965, chaps. III and IV.
35. Ibid., pp. 62, 181.
36. Kingsley Davis, 1951, pp. 73-74.
Radhakamal Mukerjee, 1926, p. 30.

the population appears to have been quite rapid. It is important that the natural rate of population growth was relatively high among the agricultural labour castes. Secondly, the landless agricultural labour population was augmented by others entering this class from outside its own ranks. This was partly the result of the disintegration of the Indian village handicraft industries consequent on the flooding of the Indian market with cheaper British manufactured articles. The unemployed village artisans began to turn to agriculture for sustenance and without any capital they had no choice but to be agricultural labourers.[37] On this point the following quotation is typical in the works on modern Indian history.

> The growing competition from machine-made goods dealt a heavy blow to the traditional means of livelihood of the village artisan, particularly weaver, who for want of better alternative turned to agriculture for earning his living as landless labourer.38

Thirdly, the agricultural labour population was replenished by those of the peasant proprietors who in the course of the nineteenth century found themselves gradually dispossesed of their landholdings.[39] This process of the disintegration of a section of the Indian peasantry has been attributed to the monetization of the agrarian economy, the growth of peasant indebtedness, and the consequent transfer of peasant lands to their creditors. The rudimentary beginnings of the monetization of the peasant sector took place in several ways. The system of land settlement which the British introduced to South India made the cultivator pay a fixed rate of land revenue to the Government in cash.[40] In case of failure to pay the land revenue, his land was liable to be forfeited

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37. S. J. Patel, 1952, pp. 38-40.

38. B. M. Bhatia, 1963, p. v.

39. S. J. Patel, 1952, pp. 48-56.
    Dharma Kumar, 1965, p. 101.

40. S. J. Patel, 1952, pp. 49-50.

and sold by the Government for the recovery of arrears. Besides, with the decline of the village handicrafts, the peasants had to purchase the foreign manufactured articles in the market. To meet these monetary exigencies and others caused by economic crises such as failure of crops, the peasants from time to time raised cash loans with their land as security. Land itself was acquiring a new economic value as a source of investment for the money-lender and the landlord in return for rents and interests on loans. Where the cultivator failed to repay their cash loans he had no choice but to transfer the title to his land either voluntarily or forcibly through the law courts to his creditors.[41] Factors such as heavy rates of interest and unforeseen natural calamities tended to make the repayment of loans extremely difficult. The law recognised the transfer of land; and the legal machinery enabled the creditors to acquire the property of the defaulting debtors. Radhakamal Mukerjee has pointed out that

> ... a rigid and elaborate legal system too often has proved only an additional instrument of oppression in the hands of the more wealthy or better instructed litigants and an additional cause of ruin to the impoverished agriculturists.42

The extent to which the natural growth of population and the disintegration of the domestic handicrafts and the peasantry contributed to increase the agricultural labour population in South India is not clear. But two factors relevant to our study emerge from the above stated developments--first, that the economic changes which occurred in nineteenth century South India tended to augment the agricultural labour population, and secondly, that the cash nexus was making inroads into the agrarian society. These are factors conducive to the growth of a wage labour system

While the above structural changes were taking place in the agrarian sector in South India the general economic conditions,

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41. Ibid., p. 53.

42. Radhakamal Mukerjee, 1926, p. 28.

particularly of the agricultural labourers, assumed a distressingly downward trend during the course of the century. Whereas the population increased, South India failed to maintain even the prevailing economic standards. There was no large-scale development of alternative employment opportunities capable of absorbing the rising landless labour population in the country-side. All new avenues of employment were restricted to a relatively small demand for labour to do works such as construction of roads and irrigation facilities. While the population pressure on agriculture was rising agricultural productivity itself lagged.[43] In fact the acreage under cultivation in South India decreased during the first quarter of the nineteenth century. The problem was not so much a lack of land. Extensive arable land was available for cultivation. But several factors retarded extention of agriculture. The heavy land taxes restricted cultivation throughout the first half of the century. In raiyatwari as well as in zamindari areas heavy collection of taxes sent many holdings out of cultivation, especially in the 1830s and 1840s.[44] In fact, in some areas the raiyats had to be compelled to cultivate their land. Dharma Kumar concludes that cultivation would have undergone further decline had the raiyats not been forced to cultivate their lands.[45] Factors such as lack of capital partly due to heavy taxes, poor agricultural equipments and techniques, unseasonable and uncertain rainfall, and the general economic position of the cultivator, especially his indebtedness, all contributed to arrest the pace of agricultural progress. Besides, the intensity and frequency of famines and epidemics seriously impeded steady economic growth and deepened the general impoverishment of the people. It is worth noting that, except for the 1880s, there was no decade in the nineteenth century which was

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43. Dharma Kumar, 1965, chap. VII.
B. M. Bhatia, 1963, p. vi.

44. Dharma Kumar, 1965, pp. 108-109.

45. Ibid.

untouched by famine or scarcity and that there was no district unaffected.[46] As Radhakamal Mukerjee observed "famines and diseases work havoc and reduce them to a state of complete disorganisation".[47] The agricultural labourers appear to have suffered most during the famines, for they were the first to be paid off and they had little resources to resist these calamities.

The growth of agricultural labour population outstripping that of agricultural productivity reacted in depressing agricultural wages.[48] At best, wages fluctuated around subsistence level, falling especially in times of famines. Conversely, prices of foodgrains assumed an upward trend partly due to relative slow progress in agriculture and partly due to exports.[49]

It is relevant to our study that South India was among the regions which had the highest proportion of the agricultural labourers in India.[50] Besides, it was also a region which experienced the dire impact of the changes which occurred in India in the nineteenth century with all its vigour for it was "... in nineteenth century Madras that the raiyatwari form of settlement was most rigorously carried through that the rate of revenue extracted were highest, that land transfers were easiest..."[51]

Just as the absence of traditional agricultural labour castes in the Kandyan areas was a vital factor in explaining the lack of a supply of plantation labour from the Kandyan areas, the presence of such a class in South India was an equally vital factor in explaining the supply of wage labour from the region. Being a traditional agricultural labour population, they did not attach a sense of social stigma for manual work

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46. R. C. Dutta, 1900, pp. 1-20.
B. M. Bhatia, 1963, pp. 7-9.

47. Radhakamal Mukerjee, 1926. p. 209.

48. Dharma Kumar, 1965, chap. IX.

49. B. M. Bhatia, 1963, pp. 9, 38-39.

50. S. J. Patel, 1952, pp. 63-68.
Morris.D..Morris, 1966, p. 193.

51. Ibid.

under supervision. Employment as agricultural workers on plantations did not involve a sacrifice of social status or breaking through customary social values and institutions.[52] To the South Indian labourer, agricultural labour was the traditional caste occupation. For him engaging in plantation labour did not necessitate a change of the social position and the social values. In contrast, in the Kandyan areas there was no large group of landless agricultural labourers. The majority of the population were either peasant cultivators or sharecroppers. For them to work on the plantations as wage labourers, they had to break through the entrenched social values which held manual wage labour as degrading.

The interplay of these several factors--the growth of population, especially the landless agricultural labour castes, the relative decline of agricultural productivity, frequent famines, and the downward trend in wages, and the high foodgrain prices--contributed to reduce a considerable population in South India to a level of chronic poverty, debt bondage, and even conditions nearing semi-starvation.[53] It was this increasing economic peril and distress which prompted a section of the South Indian agricultural labourers to look elsewhere for a living.

The planters seized the opportunity. They saw several advantages in recruiting South Indians--advantages which the planters would not gain by employing the Kandyans. First, the Indians would reside on the estates at least for several months and the planters could rely on their labour during that period. Secondly, Indian labour was cheap. The lower social position associated with wage employment among the Kandyans would make it necessary for the planters to offer somewhat higher economic rewards in order to attract them for hired labour in sufficient numbers.

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52. On the social castes and economic background of the immigrants to Ceylon, see below, pp. 109-111.

53. S. S. Raghavaiyangar, 1892, p. 97.
B. M. Bhatia, 1963, pp. v-vi.

Thirdly, the Indian labourers moved away from their homes, were more amenable to discipline. As Dr. Myrdal has pointed out, "Foreign labourers, isolated in unfamiliar surroundings were more docile, more easily organised for effective work, and were permanently attached."[54] Once the planters found that the import of South Indian labourers was in their interest, they made no serious attempt to harness any possible sources of indigenous labour. They continued to build the image of laziness of the Kandyan peasant and concentrated on devising means of recruiting an abundant supply of South Indian labour.

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54. Gunnar Myrdal, 1968, p. 971.

CHAPTER II

RECRUITMENT AND CONVEYANCE OF IMMIGRANT PLANTATION LABOURERS, 1880-1910

In the recruitment of immigrant labourers, Ceylon followed a system distinct from the general pattern of Indian labour emigration overseas. The main difference lay in emigration from South India to Ceylon being free of the restrictions which the Indian Government had imposed on the labour recruiting activities of the other recipient countries. Consequently, there was virtually unrestricted migration of Indians to Ceylon in contrast to the regulated migration to most of the other countries. In section 1 of the present chapter we will focus our attention on this fundamental divergence and account for its prevalence. Though free of Government restrictions, the migration of Indian labourers to the plantations in Ceylon was not a spontaneous movement where the immigrants came on their own in response to the demand for labour in the Island. The bulk of the immigrants were from among the most inarticulate, illiterate, and the poorest section of the population in South India.[1] They could not afford to undertake the cost of the journey to the plantations on their own. They had to be induced to migrate and eventually transported to the plantations. Thus, a whole mechanism grew up for the recruitment and transportation of the immigrant labourers to the plantations. In this mechanism, the planter, the labour recruiter, and the Colonial Government in Ceylon each played significant roles. Sections 2 and 3 of the chapter will be devoted to a study of the system of recruitment and conveyance of labour and the structural changes which it underwent during our period. We will first confine our attention in section 2 to the two major immigration

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1. See below, pp. 109-111, 276-277.

routes between South India and Ceylon with a view to bring out the hazards of the routes to the immigrants and the efforts made in our period to minimize these hazards. The main development was the decline and the eventual closure of the immigration route which was in use from the inception of plantation labour immigration to the Island in the 1830^{s} and the growth of a new route, which while enhancing the cost of transport did, nevertheless, contribute to reduce the hazards to the immigrants in their journey between South India and the estates. In section 3 we will take a close look at the institutional changes brought about in our period in the recruitment and conveyance of labour. At the beginning of our period the labour recruiter--the kangany--had a virtual monopoly over the supply of labour. The institutional changes brought about by the planters during our period were primarily aimed at loosening the kangany's monopolistic hold over the supply of labour. From the point of view of the labourers the most crucial feature in the entire system of recruitment and conveyance was the method developed by the planters to finance the poverty-stricken labourers to get to the estates. The planters paid cash advances to the labour recruiter to finance recruitment and transportation, and the estates recovered these advances from the labourers' wages by debiting their amounts to the labourers' estate account. Consequently, every immigrant labourer began his life on the plantation with an initial burden of debt. The presence of this feature can be partly attributed to the exemption of migration to Ceylon from the operation of the Indian Emigration Ordinances; for one of the cardinal stipulations in these Ordinances was the obligation of the employer to provide transport free of cost to the immigrant labourers between India and the work-place abroad.

1. "Free" labour migration [2]

Indian labour migration to Ceylon was unique in being a migration of "free" labourers in contrast to indenture labour migration to most of the other countries which obtained labour from India, particularly the West Indies, Mauritius, East and South Africa, and Fiji. Whereas the indenture labour system contractually bound the immigrant labourer to serve a particular employer for a specified period, which usually varied between three to five years, in Ceylon the Indian immigrant was considered a free labourer possessing the legal right to quit his employer's service at a month's notice. Besides, he was free to move between his homeland in South India and the work-place in the Island unrestricted by Government regulations on both sides except the bare quarantine procedure in Ceylon. Malaya and Burma shared this characteristic of Indian labour migration with Ceylon. Burma, however, was politically a part of British India up to 1937. Free labour migration to Malaya was allowed only in 1897.[3] In case of Ceylon, on the other hand, from the inception of immigration in the 1830s up to 1923 immigration took place under a "free" labour system without any attempt at controls by the Indian Government. During this period of almost a century Ceylon evolved as the perfect example of the recipient countries of "free" labour migration from India.

In order to bring out the distinction between "free" and indenture labour immigration and also explain the prevalence of a "free" immigrant labour system in Ceylon, it is necessary to discuss the salient aspects

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2. I have placed the word "free" within inverted comas because though the labourer was legally a free individual, in fact, as we shall show later on, the plantation labour system made him heavily indebted to the estate and reduced him to a state of debt bondage.

3. 'Straits Emigration', Miscellaneous Papers, MPP, Vol. 5041, Dis. No. 292 of 26 February 1896.
'Emigration', ibid., Vol. 5042, Dis. No. 890 of 19 August 1896.
Indian Government did not impose restrictions on Indian labour emigration to Malaya until 1872. However, the number of Indian labourers who went to Malaya in the mid-nineteenth century was small. The restrictions of 1872 were lifted in 1897 and labour emigration to Malaya was placed virtually on the same footing as that to Ceylon.

of the indenture labour system. Such a discussion will also help us to grasp the factors which influenced the British Indian Government and the Ceylon planters in deciding on a "free" labour system in case of Ceylon as against the indenture system.

The legal structure of the indenture system evolved during the course of the mid-nineteenth century with the enactment of a series of Emigration Ordinances by the British Indian Government laying down conditions for the recruitment and treatment of Indian emigrant labourers.[4] This body of legislation was originally enacted with regard to Indian labour immigration to Mauritius and the West Indies which were the pioneers of the recipient countries of indenture labourers from India. These Ordinances were, in fact, the result of an effort to minimize the abuses connected with the recruitment and treatment of Indian labourers while at the same time ensuring a stable supply of labour to the British enterprises in those parts of the Empire which faced acute shortage of labour.

Briefly, the crucial provisions embodied in these Emigration Ordinances were as follows.[5] The labourer and the employer had to enter into a contract which mutually bound the two parties to certain conditions. The labourer had to serve a definite period stipulated in the indenture contract. He had the option of returning to India after the expiry of the indenture or of entering into a fresh indenture contract to serve a further period specified in the new contract. If the labourer failed to work during indenture without reasonable cause or if he absconded, he was liable to be punished. The cost of his passage abroad and his return passage to India had to be borne by the employer. The country recruiting Indian labour under the indenture system had to appoint a Protector of Immigrants to look after the interests and the welfare of the recruits.

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4. I. M. Cumpston, 1953, chaps. 1 and 2.
   C. Kondapi, 1951, pp. 8-29.

5. On the indenture system, see ibid., I. M. Cumpston, 1953 and 1956; N. Gangulee, 1947; K. Gillion, 1962; K. S. Sandhu, 1969; Hugh Tinker, 1974.

He was obliged to submit annual reports to the British Indian Government on immigration and conditions of the immigrant labourers on the plantations, particularly on matters such as health, mortality, treatment by the employers, and wage payment. The recruitment and conveyance of labour was sponsored and supervised by the Colonial Government of the country which imported labour. The recruiters were licensed by the Protector of Immigrants. Before their departure from India, the recruits had to be approved by an Indian Magistrate who was expected to explain to the recruits the conditions and stipulations enacted in the contract in order to avoid kidnapping and false representation of working conditions on the estates by the recruiters. The employer was under legal obligation to provide fixed rates of wages, free housing, medical attendance, and other amenities. There was to be periodic inspection of estates by the Protector of Immigrants. Where the above conditions were not satisfactorily fulfilled, the Indian Government reserved the power to suspend emigration. Time and again, as and when abuses became glaring, the British Indian Government appointed Commissions to investigate into the recruitment and treatment of emigrants under the indenture system and even temporarily disallowed emigration from India to countries such as Mauritius, West Indies, Fiji, and South and East Africa. In spite of the legal safeguards to protect the labourers, in actual practice, the indenture system degenerated to near slavery.[6] Restriction of movement of the immigrants, employers' right of private arrest, gross disproportion of the number of males and females among indentured labourers, their illiteracy and poverty combined with the employers' economic position among other factors contributed to vitiate the working of the legal safeguards in the Indian Emigration Ordinances. The indenture system prevailed from its inception in the 1830s up to 1915 when it was totally banned by the Indian Government due to the pressure of the rising tide of Indian nationalist opinion.[7]

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6. K. S. Sandhu, 1969, p. 76.
   Hugh Tinker, 1974, chaps. 8 and 9.

7. K. S. Sandhu, 1969, p. 145.

Over the whole of this period, emigration from South India to Ceylon was exempted from the operation of the Indian Emigration Ordinances; as the Madras Government wrote "... freed from all legal restrictions."[8] The first piece of Indian legislation affecting emigration to Ceylon was enacted about fifteen years after the beginning of labour emigration to the plantations in Ceylon. Even this Act No. XIII of 1847 made only one stipulation--that the Ceylon Government should take adequate precautions to prevent Ceylon becoming an entrepôt for emigration of Indian labourers to other countries.[9] Otherwise, emigration from South India to Ceylon was left uncontrolled, unsupervised, and unrestricted by the Indian Government. When in 1880, the Ceylon Government proposed so rudimentary a system of control over the labour recruiters as licensing them by the Indian authorities in order to bind the recruiters to their responsibilities towards their labour gangs, the Madras Government firmly turned down the suggestion and pointed out that

> With regard to the general question of organizing recruiting for the Ceylon labour-market, this Government are disposed to doubt whether free action, such as has always prevailed hitherto, is not the most advantageous to the island and to the labourer.10

In the absence of control by the Indian Government, all planter-labour relations in the Island were regulated by the ordinary labour laws enacted by the Ceylon Government.[11] The law in operation at the beginning of our period as embodied in the Master-Servant Ordinance

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8. Government of India to Secretary of State for India, 28 July 1896, IEP, Vol. 4981, p. 885.
'Emigration', Miscellaneous Papers, Dis. No. 890 of 19 August 1896, MPP, Vol. 5042.

9. I. M. Cumpston, 1953, p. 116.

10. Chief Sec. of Madras to Col. Sec. of Ceylon, No. 831 of 1 June 1880, Pro. No. 6 of 1 June 1880, MPP, Vol. 1555, p. 239.
See also, Acting Chief Sec. of Madras to Chairman of the United Planters' Association of South India, No. 905 of 9 November 1904, ibid., Vol. 6894, Pro. No. 905.

11. Officer Administering the Government of Ceylon to S of S., No. 242 of 8 July 1899, C.O. 54/656.
Gov. to S of S., No. 250 of 16 May 1906, Coolie Labour in the Colonies, IOPB, Vol. 371, p. 25.

No. 11 of 1865 provided for two types of contracts between employers and employees.[12] Written contracts were valid up to a period of three years. All verbal contracts were considered monthly engagements terminable by either party at one month's notice. If a labourer's wages for a month clear of all his debts to the estate remained unpaid at the end of the succeeding month, two days' notice was regarded as adequate for the labourer to leave the estate or refuse to work. A labourer found guilty of violating the contract was liable to a fine not exceeding £5 or imprisonment up to 3 months or forfeiture of wages or a combination of these punishments. An employer guilty of violating the contract was liable up to three months' imprisonment or a fine of £5 or to pay an abatement. In practice, verbal contract meant the entry of the labourer's name in the estate Check-roll and the acceptance by the labourer of the quota of rice issued by the estate as part-payment of wages. This custom was given legal sanction by the Labour Ordinance No. 13 of 1889.[13] Though the law provided for three year contracts between employers and employees there is no evidence to suggest that the planters ever resorted to it; the monthly contracts being the only method pursued by the planters in engaging labour. In the following analysis we will examine why the Indian Government and the Colonial Government preferred unrestricted labour migration to Ceylon and why the planters preferred the system of "free" labour on short-term contracts to long-term indenture contracts.

The Indian Government explained its mild attitude partly on the ground that Ceylon had provided adequate protection and welfare facilities

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12. Up to 1865 the employer-employee relations in Ceylon were regulated by the Master-Servant Ordinances No. 5 of 1841 and No. 20 of 1861. After 1865 all such relations were governed by the Ordinance No. 11 of 1865. See M..W. Roberts, 1965.

13. Clause 5, Ordinance No. 13 of 1889, A Revised Edition of the Legislative Enactments of Ceylon, Vol. II, p. 577.

for the immigrants.[14] However, it is difficult to maintain this reason as a satisfactory explanation for exempting labour migration to Ceylon from the supervision of the Indian authorities. The Indian Government had no clear knowledge about the nature and the extent of protection and welfare facilities made available to the immigrants in Ceylon.[15] Nor did they make any serious attempt to ascertain what these were. Up to 1847 the Indian and Madras Governments turned a blind eye on the movement of labour to Ceylon—a movement which infringed the Indian Emigration laws.[16] It has been pointed out that, in that year, the Indian Government raised the question with the Ceylon Government because it became impossible to ignore the movement of labour to Ceylon any longer as the question of labour migration had, in 1847, become a matter of controversy in the Ceylon press between the Ceylon Government and the planters.[17] Even then, the Indian Government merely went by the undertaking given by the Ceylon Government to look after the well-being of the immigrants. As one writer states, the Indian Government "... did not raise awkward questions" with the Ceylon Government.[18] Throughout the second half of the nineteenth century and also during the first two decades of twentieth century there was very little correspondence between India and Ceylon on the subject of

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14. Order of the Madras Government, No. 117 of 4 February 1873, IEP, Vol. 692, p. 125.
See also, correspondence of the Collectors of Tinnevelly, Tanjore, Madura, and Trichinopoly to Sec. to the Board of Revenue, Madras, ibid., pp. 121-124.

15. Ibid.
In 1872, with reference to the question of immigration to Ceylon, the Government of India wrote, "... a migration of labor of the importance which the Government of India had not till now an adequate conception". Resolution of the Government of India, ibid., Vol. 691, p. 366.

16. According to the Indian Emigration Act No. XIV of 1839 it was illegal for persons to enter into contracts with natives of India for labour overseas except to countries specifically allowed by the Indian Government. Ceylon was not in the schedule of countries thus allowed. See, ibid., pp. 363-364.

17. K. M. de Silva, 1961, pp. 114-115.

18. Ibid., p. 115.

immigration though the tide of immigration increased heavily with the progress of the plantation agriculture in the Island.[19]

During the whole of the 30 years of our study only on five occasions did either the Indian or the Madras Government initiate correspondence with Ceylon on the subject of labour migration. The questions raised on these occasions were mostly of small relevance to the problem of protection and welfare of the immigrant labourers. Thus, in 1880 and again in 1887, India drew the attention of Ceylon to reported instances of re-emigration of Indian labourers from Ceylon to Johore and to Sarawak respectively and reminded the Colonial Government that such movement should be stopped because it contravened the conditions laid by India in 1847.[20] In 1896, Madras suggested to Ceylon the idea of maintaining a register of immigrant labourers transported by the Ceylon Government vessels.[21] Again, in 1900,

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19. Correspondence between India and Ceylon on the question of labour migration were few in the years 1847-80. In 1859 Ceylon consulted Madras on the Ceylon Government project to employ steamers to import labourers. The project was eventually given up by the Ceylon Government. Again, in the same year, when Ceylon sought to obtain labourers from the Ganjam District, Madras objected in ignorance of the India Emigration Act XIII of 1847 which allowed emigration to Ceylon free of restrictions. The Ganjam project too was given up by the Ceylon Government on its own accord. In 1872, the Government of India called for the immigration and labour laws which were in operation in the different British and foreign colonies which imported labour from India. This general circular was also sent to Ceylon. It was from Ceylon's reply to this circular that India came to learn about the Ceylon Master—Servant Ordinance No. 11 of 1865. India had no comments to make on the Ordinance. Again, in 1872, India inquired about the conditions of immigrant labour in Ceylon. This was in response to a despatch from the C.O. to India Office in which C.O. enclosed a copy of a report on the alleged high death rate among immigrants coming to Ceylon. India eventually accepted Ceylon's view that the death rate was not very high as given in the aforesaid report. It was only once in the entire period 1847-80 that Madras expressed a view which had some important effect. This was in 1859 when it objected to Ceylon Ordinance No. 15 of 1859 making provision for the employers to enter into lengthened engagements of three years.
See 'On the conditions of Malabar emigrants in Ceylon', IEP, Vol. 691, pp. 363-366. Also, 'Coolie emigration from Madras Presidency to Ceylon', ibid., Vol. 692, pp. 121-125.

20. Officiating Under Sec. to the Government of India to Col Sec. of Ceylon, No. 77 of 9 April 1880, MPP, Vol. 1555, p. 187.
Sec. to the Government of India to Col. Sec. of Ceylon, 10 January 1887, IEP, Vol. 2975, p. 59.

21. 'Immigration from India to Ceylon', Miscellaneous Papers, MPP, Vol. 5042, Dis. No. 1171 of 3 November 1896.

India requested information on the wage rates paid to immigrant labourers in Ceylon and was satisfied with a very brief reply from the Ceylon Government.[22] In the same year, Madras requested Ceylon to improve the sanitary conditions of Tataparai immigration Camp set up by Ceylon on the South Indian coast to handle labour immigration.[23] It was only in 1909 that a question pertaining to the protection and well-being of the labourers was raised with the Ceylon Government in our period. The problem was taken up when a Catholic priest in North Arcot submitted to the Madras Government a petition of several labourers alleging ill-treatment by a kangany who was in the employ of an estate in Ceylon. After an inquiry, the Colonial Government concluded that the complaints of the labourers were misleading and some were even false. Madras raised no further queries.[24] Even when the Ceylon Government took the initiative to ascertain the views of the Madras Government on the Ceylon Labour Ordinances enacted in 1884 and 1890, the Madras officials had little or no significant comments to make. More important, on the latter occasion the Madras Board of Revenue was even explicit that it had little knowledge on the actual situation of the immigrant labourers in Ceylon.[25] It is therefore difficult to conclude that the absence of intervention into labour migration to Ceylon was the result of the conviction on the part of the Indian authorities that the immigrant labourers were being well looked after in Ceylon. Though some of the gross abuses and irregularities so notorious in the early years of labour recruitment and labour management in the West Indies, Mauritius, and Fiji were not present in Ceylon with the same degree of intensity, yet the immigrants coming to Ceylon were subject to various irregularities,

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22. Sec. to the Government of India to Col. Sec. of Ceylon, No. 325 of 9 February 1900, IEP, Vol. 5899, Pro. No. 48 of April 1900.

23. 'Emigration', Miscellaneous Papers, MPP, Vol. 5990, Dis. No. 569-570 of 15 June 1900.

24. 'Emigration--Ceylon', MPP, Vol. 8254, Pro. No. 626 of 21 August 1909. Editorial, COW, 4 September 1909.

25. 'An Ordinance to amend the Labour Law', MPP, Vol. 2348, Pro. No. 1703 of 1 August 1884.
'Immigration', ibid., Vol. 3511, Pro. nos. 269-270, of 13 March 1889.
'Ordinance amending the law relating to Indian emigrants in Ceylon', IEP, Vol. 3445, p. 157.

especially long arrears of wages, even non-payment at times, and to frauds and extortion by the labour recruiter. Besides, mortality among the labourers both en route and on the estates was high in the mid-nineteenth century.[26] These were problems which called for Government intervention. But neither the Indian nor the Madras Government press the authorities in Ceylon to bring about measures to lessen the hardship the immigrants coming to Ceylon had to face.

The mild attitude of the Indian Government towards labour immigration to Ceylon has been ascribed partly to the absence of a tradition of widespread plantation slave-labour in the Island. In the West Indies and Mauritius, the Indian immigrant labour system replaced slavery and consequently there was a fear that if the fate of the immigrants were left entirely in the hands of the old slave plantation owners the new labour system would degenerate into what it replaced. The Indian Emigration Ordinances were partly meant to prevent such an eventuality. In the case of Ceylon such fears did not arise.

However, it cannot be ignored that the Indian Government enacted stringent laws regulating labour migration to Assam, Fiji, and for a time to Malaya though plantation slavery of the type which existed in the West Indies and Mauritius was absent in these places. There is no doubt that the labour background was among the strongest of forces which influenced the formulation of the overall policy of the Indian Government towards labour migration to the West Indies and Mauritius in the mid-nineteenth century. But once that policy was formulated it became the overall policy of the Indian Government towards all countries which sought Indian labour irrespective of whether these countries had a slave-labour background or not. But Ceylon was exempted from it.

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26. K. M. de Silva, 1965, Appendix VII, pp. 299-300.
I. H. Vanden Driesen, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, London, 1954, pp. 186-187.
M. W. Roberts, 1966c, pp. 82-83.

The system of recruitment of labour for Ceylon throws some light in explaining why the migration to Ceylon was left free of control. The Ceylon planters employed the more enterprising individuals in their immigrant labour force to recruit labour. These individuals, who came to be known as kanganies, were not merely labour recruiters; they usually travelled with their labour gangs from South India to the estates and eventually supervised the labourers' at work. The system will be analysed in detail in the course of the present chapter. Here it is sufficient to note that this system of recruitment, with all its evils, had the virtue that the recruiter's dealings with the recruit did not end with the first stage of recruitment. Instead, he lived on the estate with his recruits, as their immediate "head". Besides, the kangany usually recruited from among his relations, friends, and his village-folk in South India. Thus, the immigrant labourer lived with his familiar kinsfolk with one of their kind as the leader who naturally had an understanding of their language, customs, and prejudices. The Madras officials saw in this system of recruitment a reason for non-interference into labour migration to Ceylon.[27] The recruitment of labour to most of the other countries was done either by professional recruiters or speculators in the labour market. They handed over their recruits to the Recruiting Agent of the labour importing country concerned, who normally operated his activities from the Indian port of embarkation of the labourers. The recruiter's dealings with the labourer ceased after handing over the recruit to the Agent and thereafter the labourer was in strange hands. The professional recruiter's relationship with his recruits was a highly impersonal one, and on the whole the system assumed the character of a traffic in the sale of recruits more than the kangany system ever did. This method of recruitment gave the recruiter greater opportunities to indulge in kidnapping and deceit than the kangany system and therefore in the eyes of the Indian officials called for a certain degree of supervision and control.

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27. Acting Collector of Madura to Sec. to the Board of Revenue, Madras, No. 352 of 2 December 1872, IEP, Vol. 692, pp. 124-125.

Furthermore, among the Madras officials, there was no doubt about the benefits to South India of maintaining a policy of unrestricted labour emigration to Ceylon.[28] In common with the other fields of migration, Ceylon helped in some ways to reduce the population pressure in South India. It also brought in remittance to India by way of savings of the labourers and cash advances paid to procure labour. There were also other benefits of a specific nature which labour emigration to Ceylon offered India as against the labour migration to countries such as the West Indies and Mauritius. In Ceylon work was available for whole families.[29] Besides, during the famine years in South India, Ceylon served as an outlet for some of the most depressed people in the Presidency.[30]

It is also fundamental to the question under discussion that the labourers who came to Ceylon were on short-term contracts and that they had the facility to travel to and fro between their villages and the plantations in the Island. The relative proximity and the high seasonality of the demand for labour on the coffee estates were the decisive factors. Until 1865 the labourer had the right to quit his employer at a week's notice and thereafter, as we have seen earlier on, at a month's notice.[31] The coffee planter, however, successfully kept the labourers tied to the estate during the peak season of work-load by withholding a part of the labourers' wages.[32] But holding up wages until the end of the crop season was not considered at the time as a gross irregularity; it was quite common in the agricultural operations in India.[33] At the end of the coffee season

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28. Order of the Board of Revenue, Madras, No. 117 dated 4 February 1873, ibid., p. 125.

29. See below, pp. 111-113.

30. See below, pp. 115-117, 121-122, 124, 126.

31. Master-Servant Ordinance No. 5 of 1841, A Collection of the Legislative Acts of the Ceylon Government from 1796, Vol. II, pp. 122-124. See above, p. 41.

32. See below, pp. 226-227.

33. Acting Collector of Tinnevelly to Sec. to the Commissioner of Land Revenue, Madras, No. 117 of 19 February 1889, MBRP, Vol. 3533, Dis. No. 156 of 2 March 1889. p. 2.

the bulk of the labourers were laid off from work. Thus, they were free to return to South India seasonally and there was no danger of long-term bondage in the plantations in Ceylon, especially during the coffee period. Because of the proximity of the Island to South India, the question of the return passage was not regarded as a major problem. In fact, the British Indian Government viewed the movement of Indian labourers to Ceylon as something in the nature of an internal migration.[34]

Where short-term contract was the accepted form and where the labourers had the facility to return to their villages in India after a few months of work abroad, the Indian Government felt that the labourers could look after themselves; that stringent regulations were not quite essential for the protection of the emigrants and that if the conditions at the work-place abroad were intolerable or if there was gross ill-treatment these would soon react on the supply of labour. In 1873, when the Government of India for the first time made brief inquiries from the Madras Government about the conditions of immigrant labour in Ceylon, Madras resolved that there was no need for any interference because Ceylon was "... an easily accessible market for surplus labour with which intercourse is so constant and whence return is so easy."[35] Again in 1889, the Madras Board of Revenue wrote that the distance was so short and the passage so easy that "... any general ill-treatment of the Indian coolies by the Ceylon planters would in a short time be followed by a considerable decrease in the emigration to the island."[36] The attitude of the Government of India towards labour migration to Ceylon was vividly seen in its reply to a proposal to place Indian labour migration to British East Africa on the same footing as that to Ceylon. In rejecting the proposal the Government of India informed the

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34. Government of India to Secretary of State for India, 6 May 1909, IEP, Vol. 8241, p. 521.

35. Order of the Madras Government, No. 117 dated 4 February 1873, ibid., Vol. 692, p. 125.

36. Resolution of the Madras Government, No. 156 dated 2 March 1889, MBRP, Vol. 3533, Dis. No. 156 of 2 March 1889.

Secretary of State for India that,

> The exemption which has been allowed in case of Ceylon ... is due to the existence of special conditions. Ceylon is geographically a part of India, and there is little intrinsic reason why emigration from one to the other should be subjected to special conditions any more than emigration from one district of Madras to another or to Mysore. ... there is a comparative short sea voyage ... it had sprung up spontaneously as a natural result of easy inter-communication,.... The term of contract where it exists is short, there is a constant stream of labourers going and returning between the two countries, the conditions in the country of emigration are completely known to the classes from which emigrants are drawn, and any change for the worse in these conditions would instantly produce its effect upon the supply. 37

It appears that proximity, short-term contracts, and the facility to travel to and fro were the most fundamental reasons for the genial attitude of the Indian Government towards immigration to Ceylon; for where Ceylon attempted to obtain labour from India in contravention of these particular factors, India refused to allow unrestricted labour migration to Ceylon. Thus, in 1874, when the Ceylon Planters' Association approached the Indian Government through the Ceylon Government to obtain labourers from Bengal for estate work, the Bengal authorities pointed out that labour recruitment to Ceylon from Bengal should be placed under those Indian Emigration Ordinances which regulated emigration to the West Indies and Mauritius.[38] The Bengal Government laid down the specific conditions on which it was ready to permit labour emigration to Ceylon. The labourers were to be indentured for a period of five years. The number of days of work, the hours of work to be given to the labourers, and the wage rates to be paid were stipulated. The employers were to provide passage, dwellings, food, and medical care of the labourers free of charge. Ceylon eventually dropped the idea. Again, in 1897, when a suggestion was mooted to recruit labour for Ceylon from the North Western Province of India, the Indian Government replied that a special law for the regulation and protection of

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37. Government of India to Secretary of State for India, 6 May 1909, IEP, Vol. 8241, p. 521.

38. Sec. to the Government of Bengal to Sec. to the Government of India, No. 2661 of 13 July 1874, ibid., Vol. 693, pp. 227-229.
Sec. of PAC to Col. Sec., 24 May 1897, PPAC 1898, Correspondence, pp. xli-xlii.

emigrants was necessary if Ceylon was to obtain labour from that Province.[39]

It was also made clear by India that even from the Madras Presidency unrestricted migration to Ceylon was permitted only if the labourers were employed on short-term contracts. The problem came up in 1905 when the Ceylon Government attempted to recruit a relatively few Indian labourers to its Poineer Corp on indenture contracts. The Indian Government drew the attention of the Ceylon Government to an Indian Government Order of 1877 which stipulated that recruitment to the Ceylon Pioneer Corp on indenture basis should be done only under the conditions laid down by the Indian Government. These restrictive conditions were distinctly stated. However, where the Ceylon Government opted to recruit labour without resorting to indenture contracts, such recruitment was exempted from these restrictions.[40] The importance attached by India to short-term engagements as a condition for unrestricted migration was also seen in 1896 in relation to Malaya. When Malaya requested India to place labour migration to Malaya on an unrestricted footing like in the case of Ceylon, the Indian Government laid it down as a condition that the Malayan planters should offer short-term contracts to the immigrants.[41]

We have also to examine why the Ceylon Government allowed unrestricted labour immigration to the Island. Indian labour migration

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39. Sec. to the Government of India to Col. Sec. of Ceylon, No. 32 of 17 March 1897, IEP, Vol. 5210, pp. 481-482.
See also, Government of India to the Sec. of State for India, 6 May 1909, ibid., Vol. 8241, Pro. No. 3 of May 1909.

40. Officiating Sec. to the Government of India to Col. Sec. of Ceylon, No. 134-8-3 of 14 February 1905, enclosure, General Order of the Government of India, MPP, Vol. 7144, Pro. No. 128 of 21 February 1905. The principal conditions were as follows. Labour recruitment was restricted to the districts of Trichinopoly, Tanjore, and Madura. Recruitment had to be done by licensed recruiters. Recruits were to be between 18 and 30 years of age. They had to be taken before the Deputy Collector of the district who had to ratify that the recruits understood the terms of the contract. The cost of transportation of the recruits and their families had to be borne by the Ceylon Government.

41. Officiating Sec. to the Government of India to Col. Sec. of Straits Settlement, IEP, Vol. 4981, p. 883.

poised a threat to the health of the Island.[42] Besides, in years of famine in South India immigrants swamped the Island in large numbers in excess of the demand for labour. During such times, the immigrants became a burden to the resources of the Island. Largely due to the heavy influx of the immigrants in the South Indian famine years of 1877-8, which strained the medical welfare schemes in the planting districts to breaking point and poised a major health hazard to the Island, the Ceylon Government proposed a Destitute Immigrants Bill in order to prevent the sick and the destitute from entering the Island. The measure was disliked by the Madras Government. Finally, with the onset of the economic depression in the Island in the early 1880s and the consequent decline in the inflow of immigrants, the draft Bill was dropped by the Colonial Government. Thereafter, as we will see later on, apart from the basic measures to safeguard the health of the Island, nothing was placed by the Colonial Government in the way of free and unrestricted entry of South Indian labour to the Island. More important, the Colonial Government took steps to encourage the inflow of labour. The Indian immigrant labourers in the Island were exempted from the poll tax imposed on the rest of the population in the Island.[43] The Colonial Government also assisted in the system of recruitment and conveyance of labour, and the immigrant labourers were granted the previlage of concessionary fares on the Ceylon Government Railway.[44]

The favourable attitude of the Ceylon Government towards unrestricted labour migration was the outcome of its desire to see that the British planting enterprises in the Island obtained an adequate supply of cheap labour. Besides, the economic prosperity of the Island and the revenue of the colonial treasury hinged largely on the progress of the plantation

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42. See below, pp. 60-75.

43. T. G. I. B. Munasinghe, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, London, 1972, pp. 89, 134.

44. See below, p. 72.

sector. However, the Colonial Government in Ceylon unlike its counterparts in the West Indies, Mauritius, and Fiji stopped short direct state-sponsorship in the recruitment and the supply of labour to the planters. Partly, it reflect the strength of the laissez faire inhibitions in the colonial administration of the day.[45] The acute shortage of labour which occurred in Mauritius and the West Indies and the consequent threat to their economies compelled the administration of those colonies to breach the overall laissez faire policies to salvage the plantation sector there. In case of Ceylon the planters had a relatively easy access to a surplus labour market and the planters on the whole did not face a prolonged acute shortage of labour.

The Government policies alone do not explain the lack of indenture labour arrangements in Ceylon, for the Ceylon planter had a choice in this matter in the years after 1865. As seen earlier on, the Master-Servant laws in Ceylon did in fact provide for indenture contracts for a period of three year. But the Ceylon planters, at first of coffee and later tea and rubber, turned down suggestions of recruiting labour on indenture. The concensus of the contemporary planter attitude is seen in the following statements made by the Labour Commission of 1908.

> ... Your Excellency's Commissioners desire once for all to record the emphatic opinion that the circumstances of Ceylon preclude the likelihood of any system of indenture for Tamil labourers proving even moderately successful. In our opinion the geographical position of the Island, the proximity to and easy accessibility of the Tamil districts of Southern India, and the family or patriarchal system, which is still the soundest basis upon which our labour force rests--conditions each one of which is advantageous to us so long as our supply of immigrants depends upon the individual volition of the coolies who compose it--all contribute to render probable the failure of any scheme of indenture of Tamil labourers.46

The planters' behaviour can be partly explained by looking into the nature of the plantation economy in the years of the

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45. K. M. de Silva, 1965, pp. 254-255, 269.

46. Cey. Lab. Com. 1908, Report, p. ix.
See also, Annual general meeting of PAC, 2 May 1903, YPAC 1903-1904, pp. 49-50.

origin and the evolution of the system of "free" emigration in the mid-nineteenth century. The plantation economy then depended entirely on the coffee culture where the crop was heavily seasonal and the bulk of the demand for labour on the plantations was confined to the several months of the coffee picking season. Indenture arrangements kept the labourers bound to the estate for several years and maintained a labour force during both the peak and slack season and as such the system was obviously uneconomical to the coffee planter. In the West Indies and Mauritius, where the planter had no choice but to adopt the indenture system, the problem of keeping the labour force employed during the slack season was met partly by providing the immigrants with land to cultivate their own food crops during the off season on the plantations. In Ceylon, the coffee planters did not have to resort to such an eventuality mainly due to three closely inter-related factors viz., the relative proximity of the Island to South India, the facility to enter into short-term contracts, and the desire of the immigrant himself to be back in his village during the slack season on the coffee estates so as to participate in the agricultural work in South India—a factor which was made possible by the coincidence of the crop season in peasant agriculture in South India with the slack season on the coffee estates in Ceylon.[47]

The foregoing argument as regard the nature of the crop, however, does not hold good in explaining the absence of indenture in our period of study, particularly in the years after 1890, when tea supplanted coffee as the major plantation crop in Ceylon. The tea crop was perennial in Ceylon, though seasonal fluctuations in the work-load on the estates did occur. On the tea estates, labourers were required throughout the year and therefore indenture agreements binding the labourers to serve the estate for a long term would appear to have been in the interest of the

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47. The season of peak work-load in the coffee estates lasted from mid-August to mid-November. This was, on the whole, a slack season in South Indian agriculture.

tea planter who required a large resident labour force. Nevertheless, the tea planter preferred to maintain the system of free labour migration.

The tea planter inherited a system which had already functioned successfully in supplying labour for over half a century. His own experience under this system after 1890 was that a radical change in the system of recruitment was not necessary to obtain an adequate supply of labour, though he did face temporary and periodic scarcity of labour.[48]

Besides, the adoption of indenture system would have placed the entire system of immigrant labour in the Island under the Indian Emigration Ordinances and therefore under the control and supervision of the Indian authorities. The planters viewed with disfavour any attempt at Government interference were it to occur even at the level of the Colonial Government. They wished for a free hand as far as possible in labour matters.[49] Indenture arrangements requiring licensed recruiters, interrogation of the would-be emigrants by Indian magistrates, the appointment of a Protector of Immigrants, periodic inspection of estates, and the forwarding of annual reports on the conditions and treatment of labourers on the estates would have meant scrutiny and control by the Indian Government. As the editor of the Ceylon Observer, Weekly Edition pointed out, "From the day of his arrival in the colony the indentured cooly is subject to rules and regulations of every kind and a paternal oversight is set up ...."[50]

Besides, evidently free emigration was cheaper to the employer than indenture labour.[51] The latter obliged the employer to provide free passage to the labourers. Of greater significance was the need to offer relatively higher inducements to obtain labour under the indenture system because indenture arrangements spelled long-term servitude of the

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48. See below, chap. 3.

49. See below, chap. 5.

50. Editorial, COW, 1 November 1904.

51. Ibid.
K. S. Sandhu, 1969, p. 87.
AnR of CLC for 1907, YPAC 1907, p. 12.

immigrants. This fact was clearly visible in case of recruitment to Malaya where both the kangany and indenture systems were adopted. Here the labourers recruited on indenture had to be given higher advances than labourers recruited by the kanganies in order to induce them to emigrate.

Besides, it was believed that indenture arrangements would be unsuccessful in Ceylon because the proximity would encourage frequent desertion of the labourers from the plantations to their villages—a belief borne out by facts in 1829 when the entire force of approximately 500 indentured Indian labourers recruited by Governor Barnes for his Pioneer Corp deserted within one year.[52] In 1880, the Madras Government pointed out the difficulty thus

> The laws at present in force in this country for regulating the emigration of labourers to other colonies are not unfrequently evaded by emigrants ... in the case of a colony so near at hand as Ceylon, it would be exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, to devise measures for preventing such evasion of law.53

On the whole, where a potential and chronic surplus of labour was available in relative proximity to the work-place, as in the case with the labour situation in South India in relation to the Ceylon plantations, it appears that a free labour market was basically in the interest of the employer, for in such a context competition occur among the labourers for employment.

While the above stated factors more specifically explain the absence of restrictive legislation on labour immigration into Ceylon, in the final analysis the crucial importance of the wider colonial context of the two countries cannot be ignored. In fact, it is important in explaining the absence of restrictive legislation as regards Malaya and Burma as well. Between these four countries they covered practically the whole of the British Empire in Asia. While British India had a chronic surplus of labour in each of the other three countries the British enterprises faced problems of labour shortage. In Ceylon it was a

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52. G. C. Mendis, 1944, p. 23.

53. Chief Sec. of Madras to Col. Sec. of Ceylon, No. 831 of 1 June 1880, MPP, Vol. 1555, Pro. No. 6 of 1 June 1880, p. 239.

"preferential" shortage; in Burma a relative and in Malaya an absolute shortage of labour. The colonial power naturally opened the frontiers of these four countries for unrestricted labour migration in order to maintain an equilibrium between the supply and demand of labour. India considered short-term contracts together with the facility for the labourers to travel to and fro between India and the work-place abroad as adequate guarantees of fair treatment. Whether the Indian Government's approach was sufficiently effective to ensure the protection and the well-being of the labourers is a question which calls for intensive analysis. The question is particularly important for, above all, taking the absolute numbers of labourers involved, the unrestricted movement of labourers to Malaya, Burma, and Ceylon was of far greater importance in the history of Indian labour migration overseas than the regulated movement of indentured labour to other parts of the world. In the course of our study we will examine how far the so called system of "free" labour migration guranteed the protection and the well-being of the labourers who came to Ceylon.

The importance of the colonial context in explaining the presence of the open-frontier situation as regards labour migration from India to Burma, Malaya, and Ceylon was clearly seen in the course of the twentieth century. With the emergence of nationalism in South Asia, the indigenous leadership of the four aforesaid countries viewed the process of unrestricted labour migration with dismay. With the gradual transfer of government responsibility and state power into their hands, they sought restrictive legislation. India herself led the way. The first step was to bring the system of "free" labour migration under the supervision and control of the Indian Government. As regards Ceylon, this was seen in 1923 when for the first time the Indian Government intervened on

a significant scale to regulate labour migration to the Island.[54] As the nationalist surge forged ahead and as the transfer of state power to the indigenous leadership increased, the intensity of restrictive legislation too became greater. The process finally culminated in the total prohibition of labour migration to Ceylon by the Indian Government in 1939.

2. The immigration routes

The routes taken by the South Indian labourers to get to the estates in Ceylon deserve our special attention. The planters were tapping a free labour market and the migrant labourers moved constantly between South India and the plantations. The supply of labour therefore hinged partly on the nature of transport facilities available to the labourers. Besides, the question of immigration routes was one of the major fields relating to the immigrant labour supply to the Island which called for effective Government intervention. The planters agitated for cheap and expeditious means of transport for their labourers. But they were not ready to assume direct responsibility in this respect. The maintenance and the improvement of immigration routes was viewed by the entrepreneur as another of those public works which should be undertaken by the Government to foster private economic enterprise; in this case to provide the routes in order to facilitate the supply of labour to the plantations. The Colonial Government fell in line with this view. Besides, there was a wider question of Government responsibility viz., the

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54. Indian intervention came with the Indian Emigration Act No. VII of 1922 which led to the Ceylon Labour Ordinance No. I of 1923. The two Ordinances brought about several important changes in the immigrant labour system in the Island. Among these were the appointment of an Indian Agent in Ceylon to look after the welfare of the immigrants, setting up of an Indian Immigration Fund financed by the employers to provide free passage to the immigrants, and the repatriation of immigrants free of cost.

See, The Report of the Controller of Indian Immigrant Labour, CAR 1923, pp. R1-R8.

protection of the public health of the Island. The source of the labour supply to the Island was also a source of deadly diseases, cholera, smallpox, and plague in particular. These diseases were not endemic in the Island. Every one of the outbreaks of cholera and smallpox which occurred in Ceylon in our period of study could be traced to South India. The migrant labourer was major source of introduction of these diseases to the Island. As regards the other countries which imported Indian labour the distance from India made the travel time act as a sort of a period of quarantine. On the other hand, the proximity of Ceylon to South India and the existence of free migration between the two countries held out a constant threat to the public health of the Island. The colony had therefore to be protected against epidemics without jeopardising the supply of South Indian labour to the plantations. As the editor of The Ceylon Observer, Overland Edition stated, the problem was

> ... how best to reconcile an unimpede immigration of Indian labour, with all legitimate efforts to exclude the terrible and fatal Indian epidemics which has never appeared as a destroyer in Ceylon except when brought on the person or in the clothings of the immigrants from India--specially immigrants of the cooly class.55

This responsibility fell on the Colonial Government which therefore began to play an effective role in the question of the transportation of labourers. The two objectives turned out to be irreconcilable particularly during the years when cholera ravaged South India. The efforts on the part of the Government to impose quarantine restrictions, which naturally affected the free flow of labour to the Island, led to recurring clashes between the Government and the planters. It will be our endeavour in the present section to show the routes taken by the immigrants and reveal the drawbacks and hazards of the respective routes and finally to see how and with what effect the Colonial Government moved into discharge its responsibility.

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55. Editorial, COO, 17 June 1890.

At the beginning of our period two routes were in use. There was the North Road, used since the commencement of immigration to the Island in the 1830s. The Ceylon Government Immigration Service (inaugurated in 1862) operated ferries between Paumben on the South Indian coast and Mannar in Ceylon--a stretch of about 20 miles. In Mannar the landing station was changed with the monsoons, Pesalai in the north-east monsoon and Vankalai during the south-west. From Mannar the immigrants had to walk approximately 150 miles across an arid country to reach Matale which was the northernmost point of the Ceylon Government railway in 1880. From Matale most of the immigrants travelled to the planting districts by rail while those who lacked sufficient funds continued to walk their way to the estates. The alternative was the sea route from Tuticorin in South India to Colombo from whence the Ceylon Government railway facilities were available to the planting districts. The Tuticorin-Colombo immigrant traffic was principally in the hands of the British India Steam Navigation Company which in the 1880s operated weekly steamers between Tuticorin and Colombo while the Asiatic Steam Navigation Company also plied steamers less frequently.

To the planter and the immigrant the two routes appeared to have their relative merits and drawbacks. On analysis, however, it appears that the Colombo route out-merited the North Road. The latter apart from involving only a short sea voyage also had the advantage of low cost. The Paumben-Mannar crossing on the Government immigration vessels cost only 25 cents per adult while the steamer fare between Tuticorin and Colombo was Rs.3.[56] Besides, the relative proximity of Matale on the North Road to the planting districts meant lower rail fare to the immigrants coming down the North Road than those coming by the sea route

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56. AR of AGA, Mannar District, CAR 1890, p. D31.

who had to catch the train to the planting districts, in Colombo.[57]

The North Road, however, suffered from several important drawbacks. The immigrants coming down the North Road had to travel a long distance on foot in South India from their villages to Paumben and also in Ceylon from Mannar to Matale due to lack of rail facilities on both sides. Consequently, the journey took a long time--approximately 7 to 9 days to reach the estates.[58] On the Tuticorin-Colombo route, on the other hand, rail facilities were available up to Tuticorin from the interior of Trichinopoly, Madura, and Tinnevelly; and travelling on foot was confined to a relatively short distance. The entire journey from South India to the estates did not exceed 3 days except during such times when quarantine measures were in force in Colombo. Immigration via North Road therefore resulted in a loss of several days of labour to the planter and a corresponding loss of wages to the labourers. This latter factor together with the cost of food en route for the greater number of days the labourers using the North Road had to travel vitiated the advantage of the low transport cost on this route.

The biggest drawback, however, was the hazards of the North Road to the immigrants and to the inhabitants of the regions through which the route lay. The long walk was tedious and left the immigrants exhausted and enfeebled on arrival at the estate.[59] The immigrant travelling on the Colombo-Tuticorin route, on the other hand, were in better physical condition.[60] Of greater consequence was the exposure of the immigrants

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57. Report of the Public Expenditure Committee, Proceedings, Cey. SP VIII of 1895, p. A17.
In 1888 the rail fare from Matale to the heart of the planting districts varied between 25 cents to Kandy and 83 cents to Nanuoya whereas the the fare from Colombo ranged between 30 cents to Kalutara and Rs.1. 36 cents to Nanuoya. 'Cooly Labour Supply for Ceylon Estates', Memorandum of Suggestions and Information issued by PAC, PPAC 1888, p. 155.

58. Chairman of PAC to Col. Sec., 16 July 1890, ibid. 1891, Correspondance, pp. xlvi-xlvii.

59. AR of GA. NCP, CAR 1889, p. H4.

60. AR of PCMO, Report of Port Surgeon, Colombo, ibid. 1898, p. A50.

and the local inhabitants in villages bordering the North Road to frequent outbreaks of epidemics, cholera and smallpox in particular.[61] These diseases frequently appeared along the North Road being introduced on most occasions by the immigrants coming from infected villages in South India. These frequent visitations of diseases together with the fatigue caused by the long walk across an unhealthy and a parched-up country through which the North Road passed had in the mid-nineteenth century resulted in heavy mortality among the immigrants coming down this route.[62] In response to the continuous agitations by the planters, the Colonial Government, particularly after 1855, took steps to improve the conditions on the Road. By 1880, there were six immigration hospitals, and a chain of dispensaries, cooly sheds, and drinking water wells along the Road provided and maintained by the Government.[63] There was also a regular patrol service along the Road mainly for the purpose of taking to the hospitals the destitute and disease-stricken immigrants found abandoned on the roadside. These steps helped to bring down the heavy rate of mortality which prevailed in the mid-nineteenth century among the immigrants using this route. But frequent outbreaks of epidemics persisted throughout the century threatening the lives of the immigrants and the local inhabitants alike, though due to the vigilant efforts of the medical officers stationed along the route, the spread of disease was checked and heavy mortality averted in our period. North Road was, in fact, considered as the main source of introduction of cholera and smallpox to the Island.[64]

The crux of the problem was the lack of effective quarantine arrangement for the immigrants disembarking at Mannar. Though the question of providing quarantine facilities at Mannar was more than once investigated, the question was never taken up by the Government with the

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61. S. A. Meegama, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, London, 1968, pp. 18, 21, 24.
62. M. W. Roberts, 1966c, pp. 82-83.
63. M. W. Roberts, 1966a and 1966b.
64. ARs of PCMO and ARs of AGA. Mannar District, CAR (annual series, 1880-1910).

degree of seriousness that it deserved.[65] According to the officials the main dissuading factor was the problem of finding adequate drinking water in Mannar for a large number of immigrants who would have had to be detained for serveral days if quarantine was organised in Mannar.[66] The Government instead of providing quarantine facilities looked upon the long march on the North Road as the best means of quarantine. As the Colonial Secretary wrote "... there is great advantage in the practical quarantine where the immigrant undergo in the 130 miles of the comparatively uninhabited North Road from Mannar to Matale...."[67]

Consequently, when cholera and smallpox appeared on the North Road it was found difficult to isolate the diseased until the disease had made some progress and taken several lives. Along the route the gangs of labourers mixed up among themselves. When cholera broke out it was usual for the victims of the gangs to be abandoned on the roadside and the rest to move on. The unfortunate victims were either picked up by the Government officers on patrol duty or they often succumbed to death by the roadside.[68] Those abandoned in this manner were a source of contamination to the other gangs coming down the Road.

Mortality en route can partly be ascribed to the physical conditions and the habits of the immigrants themselves. Those using the North Road were the most poverty-stricken and the destitute of the immigrants. They took this route primarily because of the low cost.[69] Annually a number of deaths occurred along the Road due to causes such as general

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65. Quarantine measures were observed in Mannar during serious outbreaks of cholera in South India. But these measures were not very effective. Cholera Commission Report, Cey. SP II of 1867.
AR of GA. NP, CAR 1896, p. D7.

66. AR of GA. NP, ibid. 1898, p. D5.
AR of GA. NP, ibid. 1899, p. D4.

67. Col. Sec. to Chairman of PAC, 10 July 1890, PPAC 1891, Correspondence, p. xlvi.
The AGA. Mannar referred to the North Road as "the cooly filter".
AR of AGA. Mannar District, CAR 1890, p. D33.

68. AR of PCMO, CAR 1880, p. 224c.
AR of PCMO, ibid., 1882, pp. 170D, 183D.

69. AR of GA. NR, ibid., 1899, p. D5.

debility, diarrhoea, and fevers.[70] Often the immigrants neglected their diseases at the early stage. As a rule they sought relief only when the complaints became chronic and were no longer bearable.[71] The influence of the twin factors of the strain of the walk and the habits of the immigrants in increasing the rate of mortality on the Road is best revealed by the fact that mortality was relatively higher during the latter stage of the journey.[72]

The consequences of immigration via the North Road on the health of the inhabitants of the regions through which the Road passed, viz., the Mannar District, the North Central Province, and the Matale District, were equally alarming. Outbreaks of cholera and smallpox on the North Road often spread in epidemic form in these districts resulting in heavy mortality. The villages situated near the Road were often deserted during epidemics.[73] The immigration route was in fact one of the major reasons which made Mannar the unhealthiest district in the Island and the one with the highest death rate.[74] Speaking about the effect of the route on the Mannar District, Governor West Ridgeway pointed out that

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70. ARs of PCMO, enclosures, Reports of the colonial surgeons in the Districts through which the North Road passed. CAR, (annual series, 1880-99).

71. AR of PCMO, ibid. 1882, p. 184D.

72. A study of the number of deaths which annually occurred in the six immigration hospitals on the North Road reveals that mortality was heavier in the three hospitals situated in the second half of the journey than in the hospitals in the first half of the journey from Mannar.

73. AR of GA. NCP, CAR 1890, p. H6.
AR of GA. NP, ibid. 1891, p. D7.

74. AR of AGA. Mannar District, ibid. 1892, p. D27.
Immigration and consequent introduction of cholera was, however, not the main cause for the decline of population in the Mannar District. The main reason was the desolate condition of the District due to such factors as famines, failure of monsoons, disruption of irrigation works, lack of development of agriculture, and low productivity. Besides, malaria was endemic in the District. The North Road made the situation still worse.
See S. A. Meegama, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, London, 1968, pp. 46ff.

> ... it was the Mannar route that acted to a certain extent as a preventive and saved the estates from frequent visitations of cholera, but when the system on which this route was worked was considered it will be seen that certain districts in the Northern Province were sacrificed--unnecessarily sacrificed, as we know now--to secure the safety of the planting districts.... Upon the inhabitants of the districts through which the coolies passed, the results, ... from the constant passage of infected gangs through uninfected villages, were very disastrous. It is not too much to say that the country along the cooly route was depopulated. The abandonment of the sick which was the coolies' safeguard was the villagers' ruin; what the former escaped by constantly moving on the latter retained.[75]

It is difficult to obtain accurate statistics on the mortality among the immigrants on the North Road during the entire period from 1880 to 1899, the year on which the Road was finally closed for immigrant traffic. The Government administrative and medical officers who were in charge of the immigration route maintained detailed records of the extent of the outbreaks of epidemics, treatment rendered, and mortality on the route. Being vigilant to arrest the outbreak of disease, these officers were closely familiar with the conditions on the route. The information provided by these officers can therefore be regarded as fairly reliable. However, they erred on the side of omission. With the help of the information scattered in the records of these officers an attempt is made in Table 2.1 to give some idea about the extent of mortality among the immigrants travelling on the North Road. Though detailed data are available on mortality in the Immigration Hospitals, unfortunately the information on the number of death among the immigrants up to 1890 are grouped together with those of the local inhabitants. Mortality among the immigrants are seperately available only for the years after 1890. The available statistics on death due to cholera are also somewhat confused. During the period from 1880 to 1899 cholera appeared on the North Road on a total of 10 years (1884, 1888-95, 1897-8).[76] However, the total number of deaths on all these outbreaks were not fully recorded. At times

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75. Extract from the Review of the Administration of the Affairs of Ceylon, 1896-1903, by Sir West Ridgeway, Fiftieth AnR of PAC, Appendix D, PPAC 1903-1904, no pagination.

76. ARs of AGA. Mannar District, GA. NCP. and AGA. Matale District, CAR, (annual series, 1880-99).

the victims of cholera disappeared into the jungle and these deaths escaped official attention. Sometimes outbreaks of cholera on the North Road were merely mentioned without giving any statistical information on the number of deaths. Of the number of deaths on record due to cholera a clear distinction between those among the immigrant and the local population is not always possible. Table 2.1 below gives the number of deaths in the immigration hospitals from all causes, and the number due to cholera among the immigrants and the local population as far as can be identified from the records. The number of deaths due to cholera which cannot be identified as belonging to either group is set out seperately.

TABLE 2.1 Mortality in the immigration hospitals, and mortality due to cholera in the Mannar District, North Central Province, and Matale District, 1880-1900.

Year	Immigration Hospitals		Death due to cholera in Mannar, North Central Province and Matale		
	Total deaths	Deaths among immigrants	Immigrants	Villagers	Unidentified
1880	131	119	N	N	N
1881	170)		N	N	N
1882	125)		N	N	N
1883	80)		N	N	N
1884	105)	Not possible	N	N	N
1885	185)	to identify the	N	N	N
1886	152)	number of death	N	N	N
1887	129)	among immigrants	N	N	N
1888	155)		22	N	52
1889	141)		N	N	303
1890	125)		70	4	167
1891	148	90	60	107	275
1892	185	133	138	314	202
1893	201	139	3	4	N
1894	129	82	9	5	N
1895	106	75	57	13	N
1896	99	61	N	N	N
1897	123	79	3	N	N
1898	N	199	40	149	N
1899	188	78	N	N	N
1900	79	34	N	N	N

Sources: ARs of PCMO, AGA. Mannar District, G.A. NCP, and AGA. Matale District, CAR, (annual series, 1880-1900).

N:- No information available.

In contrast to the North Road, quarantine measures were enforced by the Government in Colombo for the immigrants coming by the Tuticorin-Colombo route. The importance of Colombo as the political and administrative capital of the Island cannot be over emphasised in this respect. Colombo was also the commercial hub of the Island where the bulk of the export-import trade of the Island took place.[77] The outbreak of epidemics in Colombo would have compelled the authorities to declare the port as an infected port causing thereby a disruption in the shipping and commercial links of the Island with the outside world. Besides, the city itself was densely populated unlike the Mannar District. An outbreak of disease in Colombo was bound to spread into the provinces without much difficulty. The Colonial Government therefore undertook measures to protect Colombo from the outbreaks of contagious diseases.

Prior to 1890 quarantine was done on board the ship. Ships coming with a "clean Bill of Health" or a bill to the effect that cholera existed only in sporadic form in and around the port of embarkation were placed under observation for twenty four hours while ships coming from an infected port with a "foul Bill of Health" were placed under quarantine for a period of 5 days more.[78] When cholera was widespread in South India, as in the year 1890, these quarantine measures were rigorously enforced.

The above arrangement, however, suffered from three major drawbacks. First, though the quarantine measures were vigorously enforced by the Ceylon Government when cholera and plague ravaged South India, at other times these measures were not adequately maintained. Labourers at times succeeded in evading the quarantine measures by entering the Island

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77. Editorial, COO, 23 January 1891.
In fact the importance of safeguarding Colombo from health hazards was considered so important that the press advocated that labour immigration should be restricted to the Mannar route.

78. Col. Sec. to Messrs. Alston, Scott & Co., Colombo, 5 May 1890, PPAC 1891, Correspondence, p. xliv.

disguised as traders. At times bodies of those who died of cholera or smallpox on board the steamers were dumped into the sea and the outbreaks were not reported on the arrival of the ships in Colombo.[79] Secondly, on arrival in Colombo the immigrant labourers had to stay several hours resting and also preparing their food before en-railing for the planting districts. During this time often they were distributed by the kanganies all over the commercial section of Colombo—the Pettah— particularly in the various rice boutiques.[80] This situation held out a threat to the public health of Colombo and its environs. Besides, the lack of proper accommodation for the immigrant labourers in Colombo exposed them to considerable extortion and crimping. Thirdly, the quarantine on board the ship caused inconvenience to the shipping companies transporting immigrants from South India because it meant an indefinite delay in Colombo when the ships arrived with a "foul Bill of Health". Consequently, when "clean Bills" were not procurable the shipping companies refused to ply between Colombo and South India in order to evade prolonged quarantine. This at least once caused almost a total suspension of immigration of labour via the Tuticorin-Colombo route. While the labour supply to the plantations was thereby affected, the shipping companies had to undergo pecuniary loss.[81] Consequently, the shippers and the planters repeatedly urged the Government of the need to set up a quarantine station in Colombo to place the immigrants under observation ashore instead of on board the ship. In this agitation they found a strong ally in the Madras Government which objected to the strict enforcement of the quarantine regulations in Colombo for ships plying from Tuticorin because such restrictions

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79. AR of PCMO,, CAR 1876, p. 128.
AR of PCMO, ibid., 1877, pp. 128, 214, 216.

80. Alston, Scott & Co., to Chairman PAC., 8 September 1890, PPAC 1891, Correspondence, p. liv

81. Alston, Scott & Co., to Col. Sec., 22 January 1891, ibid., p. lxxv.

impeded the trading activities of the port of Tuticorin with Ceylon.[82]

During the 1890[s] the planter-shipper agitation together with the concern of the Government over the public health of Colombo resulted in setting up facilities ashore in Colombo for the quarantine and the accommodation of the immigrants. The increasing popularity of the Colombo route among the immigrants during the 1890[s] was the underlying factor. In 1891, a quarantine station was inaugurated at Maligawatte to accommodate up to 500 labourers when prolonged quarantine was necessary. When a vessel with cholera on board arrived in Colombo the sick were isolated in the hospital ship "Serendib" and the others who were possibly infected were removed to the quarantine station.

The most ambitious project both in respect of accommodation and quarantine facilities was undertaken by the Government in 1897 with the establishment of the Ragama Camp.[83] The immediate cause which prompted the Government to move in this direction was the ravages which bubonic plague was making in India in 1896-7. Faced with the new danger the entire quarantine policy of the Island was subject to intense re-thinking by the Government. The main idea of the Ragama scheme was to segregate all estate labourers arriving in Colombo and provide them with accommodation and essential facilities during their stop over in Colombo for the train to the planting districts. When immigrants arrived from South Indian districts which were infected with cholera and smallpox the Camp was used for

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82. Chief Sec. Madras to Gov. of Ceylon, telegram, No. 96 of 11 February 1890, MPP, Vol. 3746.
Chief Sec. Madras to Gov. of Ceylon, No. 117 of 14 February 1890, ibid.
In 1890, the Madras Government was so keen in getting the quarantine regulations relaxed that having failed in its attempt to get the Ceylon Government to relax its regulations, it approached the C.O. through the India Office. But the C.O. replied that "... The Secretary of State for the Colonies does not consider that the matter is one in which Her Majesty's Government can overrule the discretionary action of the Government of Ceylon". Secretary of State for India to Gov. in Council (Fort St. George), enclosure, R. H. Meade of C.O. to Under Secretary of State for India, 1 January 1891, MPP, Vol. 3971, Dis. No. 203, of 14 March 1891, p. 7.

83. Forty-sixth AnR of PAC, PPAC 1900, pp. 27-28.

quarantine purposes. Five seperate camps each capable of accommodating 700 labourers were established. The Camp was a sort of a lodging house. On arrival in Colombo the immigrant labourers were marched direct to a special train which took them to Ragama. Here they were provided with facilities for bathing, cooking, and lodging. The ill were hospitalized. The day after the arrival of a gang of labourers in Ragama they were despatched to the estate by rail. The cost of maintaining each gang of labourers was recouped from the planters who in turn added the amount thus spent to the estate advances account of the labourers.

The Camp was a boon to the immigrants, planters, and the inhabitants of Colombo. The immigrants were saved of the inconveniences and extortion which they had hitherto faced in Colombo. Medical attention in the Camp helped to arrest the outspread of disease in the city and also to the plantations. During the decade after 1899, 63 attacks of cholera with 51 deaths took place in the Camp. [84] These cases would have otherwise escaped to the city or the plantations. In the Camp every one of these cases were isolated, death confined to the first victims, and the outspread was rigorously avoided. Consequently, mortality on the Tuticorin-Colombo route fell far below the rate of mortality which had occurred on the North Road in the preceding decades. Besides, mortality was confined to the immigrants. The total number of reported deaths on this route during the whole period from 1880 to 1910 approximated 100 in striking contrast to the death toll on the North Road. The Camp, however, did not make the Island immune to the introduction of cholera by the immigrant labourers. The immigrants could still escape the Camp by entering the Island disguised as non-estate labour immigrants. Besides, the segregation of gangs took place only when the disease actually occurred either on board or in the Camp. Some carriers of the disease could have escaped to the estates because where there was no outbreak of cholera en route the

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84. ARs of G.A. WP, enclosure, AnR of the Superintendent of Ragama Camp, CAR, (annual series, 1899-1909).

maximum number of days a gang stayed on board and in the camp was four. That the quarantine arrangements were not completely effective is seen in the outbreaks of cholera which occurred on the estates after the establishment of the camp, though these outbreaks were not as virulent or widespread as those which brokeout prior to the establishment of the Camp.

As regards the immigrant traffic on the two routes, the main development in our period was the decline in the use of the North Road, particularly after 1890 and its eventual closure in 1899. The Tuticorin-Colombo route which was considered only as an alternative in the period before 1890 became the major route thereafter, and since 1899 to the end of our period it remained the sole immigration route. Table 2.2 reveals the trends in the use of the two routes.

The use of the North Road in the years before 1890 can be attributed to several factors. First, the North Road almost exclusively served the emigrants of those South Indian villages which were situated nearest to the Island. Thus, the emigrants from the villages in the deep south-east (from the districts of Madura, Trichinopoly, and Tanjore) preferred to walk to Paumben and cross to Mannar rather than travel a long distance from their villages to Tuticorin to get the steamer to Colombo.[85] Secondly, the desire of the poverty-stricken immigrants to obtain an immediate gain by stinting on travelling expenses made them blind to the disadvantages of the North Road.[86] Thirdly, there was the influence of the kangany whose aim was to spend as little as possible on the labourers' journey in order to retain for himself a portion of the advances given by the planters to procure labour. Finally, it is also likely that the North Road was the traditional route which was best known

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85. Alston, Scott & Co., to Chairman of PAC, 8 September 1890, PPAC 1891, Correspondence, p. lii.
AR of GA. NP., CAR 1897, p. D4.

86. Report of the Public Expenditure Committee, Proceedings, Cey. SP VIII of 1895, p. A17.

to the immigrants and their conservatism kept them to it.

In the years after 1890 three new developments seem to have affected the course of immigrant traffic. In that year the steamer facilities provided by the British India Steam Navigation Company were extended to link up Colombo with Paumben, Tondi, and Ammapatam in South India thereby enabling the emigrants of the South Indian villages who had hitherto travelled almost exclusively by the North Road to travel by the Colombo route if they wished to do so.[87] Secondly, most of the new plantations which came up during the tea boom of the 1890s were in the low-country districts of Kelani Valley and Kalutara situated nearer to Colombo. Thus, the immigrants coming to work in these plantations found the Colombo route to their advantage. Thirdly, due to the overtures of the planters a system of through booking of the labourers between the railway stations in South India and Ceylon was inaugurated in 1892.[88] The idea was to get the South Indian Railway Company, the British India Steam Navigation Company, and the Ceylon Government Railway to work in conjunction in the conveyance of labourers. The planters now found it possible to send a portion of the coast advances in through booking tickets. Besides, the system made the journey convenient to the labourers and also helped to curtail extortion of the labourers en route. The three factors mentioned above resulted in increasing the immigrant traffic on the Colombo route.

However, in spite of the increased facilities on the Colombo route a considerable number of labourers continued to use the tedious

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87. Alston, Scott & Co. to Chairman of PAC., 8 September 1890, PPAC 1891, Correspondence, p. liii.
Hitherto BISN Co. Steamers to Colombo from South India plied only from Tuticorin, carrying immigrant labour traffic.

88. Minutes of a meeting at Trichinopoly between E. J. Young (PAC Commissioner), H. B. Mactaggart (of BISN Co.) and W. S. Betts (of South Indian Railway Co.) on 19 February 1892, PPAC 1893, Correspondence, pp. xxv-xxix.
CGG., No. 5184 of 4 November 1892.

North Road right up to its final closure in 1899. It is likely that the bulk of the labourers coming to work in the northern planting districts such as Matale and Kandy still preferred to travel by the North Road. In this respect it is important that the most prominent among the planters who took a keen interest in maintaining and improving the North Road were the planters of these districts. Besides, throughout the 1890s the steamer from Paumben, Tondi, and Ammapatam to Colombo plied only once a week. The labourers seem to have preferred the Mannar crossing to the long delay for the Colombo-bound steamer.

The planters on their part were aware of the clear advantage of the Colombo route over the North Road.[89] They repeatedly attempted, though without success, to get the major drawback of the Colombo route, viz., its cost of passage reduced by approaching the British Indian Steam Navigation Company.[90] However, the planters were successful in their effort to obtain concessionary fares for the immigrant labourers travelling on the Ceylon Government Railway. In spite of the growing popularity of the Colombo route and the hazards of the North Road, the planters firmly insisted on maintaining both routes. They believed that the restriction of labour immigration to the Colombo route would seriously hamper the labour supply to the plantations--a conviction not entirely without justification, for even in the late 1890s a substantial section of the immigrant traffic took place along the North Road. The fact is that in spite of the relative advantages of the Colombo route, the planters were not prepared to rely on one route alone. Even were the use of the North Road to decline the planters still wanted it to be maintained as an alternative route which they thought will be invaluable in times of

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89. Chairman of PAC to E. B. Creasy, 5 September 1889, PPAC 1890, Correspondence, pp. xliii-xliv.

90. Bois Brothers & Co. to Chairman of PAC., 24 May 1892, ibid. 1893, Correspondence, pp. xxxii-xxxiii.
Sec. of PAC to Messrs. Bois Brothers & Co., 5 February 1897, ibid. 1898, Correspondence, p. xxxi.

temporary hazards on the Colombo route.[91] In the early 1890s when a virulent cholera outbreak in South India had caused the Colonial Government in Ceylom to suspended its Immigration Service between Paumben and Mannar which temporarily shut the North Road, the planters and the pro-planter press were very strong in their condemnation of the action of the Government.[92] Next year, when the Government inquired from the planters their preference between the Colombo route and the North Road, the planters viewed the inquiry with deep suspicion. They refused to be explicit on their preference of the Colombo route and insisted on the absolute necessity of maintaining both these routes. In the succeeding years the planters strongly supported by the local press repeatedly pressed the Government for a northern railway, and if possible an Indo-Ceylon rail connection via Mannar.[93] In every one of the Annual Reports of the Planters' Association after 1890 this need was emphasised.

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91. Annual general meeting of PAC, 17 February 1897, PPAC 1898, pp. 30-32.
In fact the planters examined at length the possibility of setting up a third route by sea from Negapatam in South India to Hambantota in the south-east coast of Ceylon and from thence by land, to cater mainly to the planting districts of Badulla, Passara, and the environs. The project was eventually dropped because the cost of inauguarating the new route was found on estimation to outweigh the value of immigrant traffic by the route. Besides, the proposal to construct the Uva railway was being seriously considered during this time. On the proposed Hambantota route, see the thirty-seventh AnR of PAC, PPAC 1891, p. xxx.

92. A general meeting of the Dolosbage and Yakdessa DPA, 22 March 1890, COO, 25 March 1890.
A general meeting of Dikoya DPA, 12 May 1890, ibid., 15 May 1890.
Editorial, ibid., 24 April 1890.
Chairman of PAC to Col. Sec., 27 February 1890, PPAC 1891, Correspondence, p. xxxiii.

93. Editorial, COW, 24 December 1906.
Editorial, ibid., 3 January 1907.
A general meeting of PAC, 31 January 1898, PRAC 1898, pp. 142-158.

TABLE 2.2 Labour immigration via the North Road and the Tuticorin-Colombo route, 1880-1910. (in round numbers)

Year	North Road	Tuticorin-Colombo route	Percentage via Tuticorin-Colombo route
1880	20,800		
1881	27,400		
1882	26,600		
1883	15,600		
1884	20,500		
1885	24,000		
1886	18,000		
1887	24,000		
1888	51,800		
1889	34,100	4,970	13
1890	40,700	15,000	27
1891	47,700	26,000	36
1892	45,600	37,300	46
1893	34,500	20,400	36
1894	29,100	21,100	42
1895	31,400	50,200	61
1896	28,300	60,500	68
1897	27,500	95,600	78
1898	17,400	73,800	84
1899	3,500	23,700	85
1900	..	128,700	100

Sources: Returns of Immigrants in the Port of Colombo, showing their destination, trade, and occupation, (published by-annually), by the Superintendent of Immigration, Colombo, CGG, (1889-1900)
ARs of AGA, Mannar District, CAR, (annual series, 1880-1900).

In spite of the planters' agitation for maintaining and improving the North Road, the end came in 1899 when Governor West Ridgeway decided to shut the Road for immigrant traffic. Particularly in the context of the late 1890s the Governor's decision was undoubtedly a wise step. Ridgeway was influenced primarily by the danger of the introduction of plague from South India to the Island. In 1897, there was a virulent outbreak of plague in India and several British territories which imported Indian labour totally suspended immigration. In Ceylon the Government decided to keep plague at bay without jeopardising the immigrant labour supply to the plantations. Immigration was restricted to the Colombo route

and quarantine arrangements and plague precautions on the Colombo route were improved and rigorously enforced. A specially instituted plague committee was entrusted with the work of framing and enforcing precautionary measures. The closing of the North Road was in fact done on the strong recommendations of this committee. Governor Ridgeway's views are worth quoting in extenso. He wrote,

> I felt that it was impossible, with due regard to the safety of the Island, to treat plague as cholera had been treated, mainly because it was apparent that the two diseases were in some essential respects very different. Cholera, it has been found by experience, inevitably wears itself out, becomes less virulent, and ultimately vanishes, even without remedial measures. The inhabitants of the districts along the cooly route had indeed suffered from frequent outbreaks, but when the disease had exacted a certain number of victims it disappeared, and its ravages did not extend to other parts of the country. Not so with plague; the history of the disease shows that once it has established itself human efforts are almost powerless either to eradicate or prevent it from spreading. Whatever the results of restriction might be, it was impossible to sanction a system by which gangs of coolies, some of them probably plague-infected, would keep travelling along a hundred and thirty miles of road, leaving behind on the road such of their members as might be attacked by the disease. Such a course could have had but one endings: the plague would have obtained a footing in the Northern Province, and once it had obtained a footing ... other parts of the Island must sooner or later have been attacked in consequence, and our ports proclaimed as infected.94

The closing of the North Road for immigrant traffic was facilitated by the increasing popularity of the Colombo route among the planters as well as the immigrants during the 1890s. As seen already, Colombo had by 1899 become the main port of disembarkation of the immigrants and the arrivals by the North Road had declined. Besides, the Government was incurring expenses on maintaining two routes. In view of the decline of the immigrant traffic on the North Road it was difficult to justify the expenditure on the North Road when at the same time the Government was incurring a heavy expenditure on improving the Colombo route.95 Ridgeway's action was vindicated by the results. Closing of the North

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94. Extract from the Review of the Administration of the Affairs of Ceylon, 1896-1903, by Sir West Ridgeway, Fiftieth AnR of PAC, Appendix D, YPAC 1903-1904, no pagination.

95. Annual general meeting of PAC, 17 February 1904, ibid., p. 55.

Road, the establishment of Ragama Camp, and plague precautionary measures helped to keep plague out of the Island. The almost annual outbreaks of cholera in the Mannar District and the North-Central Province came to an end.

The planters acceded to the closing of the North Road only in the hope that it would be a temporary measure. Once the danger of plague subsided the planters concentrated their efforts to get the North Road re-opened minus its major drawback, viz., the long walk, by getting a railway extention northward connecting the railway network in the planting districts with Mannar.[96] During the first decade of the present century, encouraged by three factors, the planters pushed their agitation ahead. First, with the onset of the post-1904 rubber boom the planters faced the problem of procuring an adequate supply of labour, particularly during the peak seasons. The construction of a railway to Mannar came to be viewed by the planters as one of the effective means of solving this problem. Secondly, in 1905 the South Indian Railway was extended up to Paumben and Rameswaram and a further extention of this line to Dhanuskodi was being undertaken. On the sub-continent, Dhanuskodi was the nearest point to Mannar. These developments on the South Indian Railway brought the question of railway connection with South India within the realm of reality if the Colonial Government in Ceylon could be persuaded to construct a railway to Mannar.[97] Thirdly, the decision of the Government in 1902 to construct the Northern Railway to Jaffna aroused the interest of the planters to obtain rail facilities to Mannar. The Northern Railway branched off from the Colombo-Kandy railway which extended to the heart of the up-country tea planting districts. When the project of the Northern

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96. AnR of Pussellawa DPA for 1899, COW, 2 February 1900.
Editorial, ibid., 7 February 1900.

97. Annual general meeting of PAC, 8 February 1907, YPAC 1906, p. 82.
'The Northern Route', Report of the Cooly Routes Commission, ibid., Correspondence, pp. 161-168.
AnR of CLC for 1907, YPAC 1907, p. 14.

Railway was still in the blue-print stage the planters attempted to persuade the Government to have Mannar rather than Jaffna as the terminus of the new line. Compared with Mannar, which was the nearest point on the Island to South India, Jaffna was ill-suited as an immigration port. The planters viewed with dismay the Government decision to overlook Mannar as the terminus. Nevertheless, the construction of the Jaffna line made the Mannar link-up, relatively, an easy task. Henceforth, the planters concentrated on obtaining a branch rail from either Vavoniya or Madawachchi on the Northern Railway to Mannar.[98] The Mannar-Vavoniya extention was eventually completed only in 1913 after which immigration resumed via Mannar. Thus, during the last decade of our period Mannar route remained shut.

The immediate effect of the closing of the North Road in 1899 on the immigrant labour supply to the Island was confused by the unprecedented influx of immigrants in 1900 due to the major famine which affected India. It is, however, likely that the non-existence of the North Road in the post-1904 years would have contributed in some measure to aggravate the problems of procuring an adequate supply of labour which the planters faced, particularly in the peak seasons in the years of the rubber boom.[99] But the effect could have been merely marginal. By the end of the 1890s the North Road was already suffering in comparison with the Tuticorin-Colombo route in the eyes of the labourers. The cost of transportation no doubt increased under the new arrangement. But this was adequately compensated by the relative comfort and the swifter means of transport which the labourers obtained on the Tuticorin-Colombo route. Besides, the changes in the system of labour transport brought about in our period

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98. A general meeting of PAC, 13 July 1906, ibid. 1906, pp. 27-31. The Ceylon Labour Commission in Trichinopoly repeatedly urged the re-opening of the North Road.

99. See below, chap. 3.

made the entire system of conveyance more organised, dependable, and smooth in its working. The fear of the recurrence of an abrupt interruption of the labour traffic, as the one which occurred in 1890, became very remote. The hazards of the route on the immigrants were reduced and the threat which immigration held to the health of the Island was curtailed.

3. Institutional arrangements for the recruitment and conveyance of immigrant labour

In the recruitment of labour from South India the tea planter of the 1890[s] inherited a system developed by the coffee planters of the previous generation. Under this system the recruiter, the kangany, was usually the more enterprising element among the immigrant labourers themselves. The planters made no organised effort either individually or collectively to undertake direct recruiting. Instead the individual planters entrusted the work of recruitment solely in the hands of the kanganies of their choice. These kanganies were given cash advances by the planters to cover the preliminary expenses involved in the recruitment and transportation of labourers to the estates. These cash advances were entered in the estate "Debt Account" as a charge against the kangany and his gang.[100] In selecting their kanganies the planters were primarily guided by the trust and the ability shown by these men in matters pertaining to labour. It was the kangany who publicised the working condition on the plantations among his less articulate fellow-men in South India and induced the latter to migrate.[101]

The kangany's role did not, however, end with procuring labour for the plantations. The entire labour force was organised under the kanganies, each kangany with his gang of labourers attached to him. He

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100. Cey. Sab. Lab. Com. 1915, para. 17.

101. The best description of the kangany system as existed at the beginning of our period is found in P. D. Millie, 1878, chap. III.

supervised the field work of the labourers and conducted all planter-labour negotiations and transactions. The estates were almost completely dependent on the kanganies for the supply of labour. Thus, to the planter the kangany was sort of a labour contractor, and to the labourers he appeared as their immediate employer. The incentive for the kanganies to engage in recruitment was the fact that, initially, he obtained a sum for every new recruit to the estate, and thereafter his regular income depended on the number of labourers in his gang who turned up for work.

The planters on their part desired a supply of labour with the least amount of direct involvement in recruitment partly because of the personal difficulties and inconveniences such work involved and more particularly because of their conviction that it would be extremely difficult for a white employer to induce the South Indians to migrate to the plantations for work--a conviction confirmed in ample measure by the totally unsuccessful experience of those few planters who made attempts at direct recruitment.[102] The kangany's personal ties with the South Indian villages, his influence (for many a kangany were heads of joint-families), and his knowledge of the indigenous customs and the attitudes of his fellow-men enabled him to undertake succesfully the recruitment and transportation of Indian labourers. Besides, it was both convenient and less risky for the planters to deal with the kanganies in giving out advances than deal with each individual labourer seperately. The planter, therefore, gave a lump sum of money to the kangany to be given to the recruits and held the kangany resposible to the estate for the entire sum. Where the labourer was tied by debt to the kangany, the risk of the former absconding was less, for the labourer was normally personally known to the kangany. Besides, the kangany's influence in his community and his customary hold over the labour gang were important factors which checked any inclination on the part of the labourers to

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102. AnR of CLC for 1915, YPAC 1915, pp. 55-56.

bolt. The crucial position thus held by the kangany in the recruitment and conveyance as well as in the management of the labour force explains the reluctance of the part of the planters to do away with the kangany system despite the abuses perpetrated by the kangany to the detriment of both the planter and the labourer.

In the recruitment of labour, the evils of the kangany system were largely associated with the disbursement of cash advances. The kanganies strove to retain the greater share of the advances for their personal benefit.[103] The labourers were paid the minimum by way of advances, and they also stinted on the travelling expenses and the food of the labourers en route. Little attention was paid to the comfort of the labourers on the journey. However, evils such as kidnapping, enticing, and misrepresentation of working conditions which were widely practised by the professional labour recruiters working for the West Indies, Mauritius, and Fiji were not very common in the recruitment of labour for Ceylon in our period. This was partly because of the practice of recruiting friends and relations, and partly because the conditions in Ceylon were not completely alien or unknown to the agricultural population in the southernmost districts of the Madras Presidency.[104]

Ideally, the kangany system comprised two types of kanganies.[105] On the one hand, there was the sub-kangany with a relatively small labour gang consisting of mainly his family members and close relatives. On the other hand, there was the head kangany with several sub-kangany gangs under his control and supervision. The number of head and sub-kanganies

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103. 'The Reduction of Estate Expenditure. No. I', by M. P., WCO, 11 June 1880.
'Superintendent of Immigration. Report of his trip over the Immigration Routes in connection with blackmailing &c', PPAC 1897, Correspondence, p. cxlvii.

104. Correspondence of the Collectors of Tanjore, Madura, and Trichinopoly Districts, and the Master Attendent of Tuticorin to Sec. of the Board of Revenue, Madras, IEP, Vol. 692, pp. 121-124.
Resolution of the Madras Government, No. 156 dated 2 March 1889, MBRP, Vol. 3533, Dis. No. 156 of 2 March 1889, pp. 3-4.

105. Cey. Lab. Com. 1908, Report, p. vii.

on the estates varied with the requirements of each plantation. The size of a gang under a kangany depended largely on his enterprising skill, his influence among his fellow-men, his financial resources, and his contacts with the planters. Particularly, the head kanganies' gangs varied widely in their numerical size. Table 2.3 gives some idea of the size of the head and sub-kangany gangs.

TABLE 2.3 A select list of head and sub-kanganies.

Head kanganies

Name of head kangany	No. of sub-kanganies under head kangany	Total labour force under head kangany	No. of labourers in head kangany's own gang	Caste of head kangany
Veeren	2	37	N	Vellala
Aravandy	12	58	23	N
Veeren	11	136	60	N
Vatha Mooto	N	143	N	N
Marie	14	157	32	N
Selle	N	206	N	N
Sinniah	N	476	N	N

Sub-kanganies

Name of sub-kangany	No. of labourers in sub-kangany's gang	Caste of sub-kangany
Carupan	4 (one family)	N
Manicutty	5 (")	N
Pelli Cooty	8 (")	N
Palani	4 (")	N
Raman	13	Pariah
Sellan	15	N

Source: Cey. Lab. Com. 1908, Appendices.

N:- No information available.

The distinction between the head and sub-kanganies was an important one in the entire organisation of the labour force. The sub-kanganies normally worked in the field with their gangs drawing daily wage rates like all other labourers. In addition, he received a commission known as "pence money" at the rate of 4 cents per day for each labourer of his gang who turned up for work each day. The head kangany, on the other hand, did not normally take to field work. His work was mainly confined to the supervision and organisation of the labour gang for which he was normally paid a monthly wage by the estate. In addition, he received a commission known as "head money" at the rate of 2 cents per labourer of his gang who turned up for work each day.[106] Both the head and the sub-kanganies who went to South India to recruit labour got the opportunity to augment their income by retaining a part of the cash advances paid by the estates to obtain labour. It is important to note that the evils of the kangany system were associated more with the head kanganies than the sub-kanganies, the latter been heads of several related family units.[107] The head kangany, on the other hand, was less a paternal head and more a labour contractor. In fact, the sub-kanganies themselves were exploited by the head kanganies.[108]

The only institutional arrangement in South India at the beginning of our period which dealt with labour migration to Ceylon was the Ceylon Government Immigration Agency at Paumben. The Agency was set up with very restricted objectives. Its main functions were to subject the immigrants to a medical examination prior to embarkation and to organise the Government Immigration Service between Paumben and Mannar. However, due to lack of any other suitable organisation in South India to look after the planters' interests relating to the supply of labour several

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106. Cey. Lab. Com. 1908, Report, p. viii.

107. 'Head and Sub-kanganies', by XYZ, WCO, 15 July 1885.

108. AnR of Badulla DPA for 1895, COO, 27 February 1896.

other functions devolved on the Agency.[109] Those kanganies and their gangs who were at times held up in South India due to lack of sufficient funds to travel to the estates were initially financed by the Agency and the money subsequently recovered from the planters. In most cases the Agency helped the kanganies to get in touch with the planters to obtain the necessary finances. The cases of bolting labourers and complaints against extortion en route were also dealt with by the Agency. However, the organisation was too small to cope with these functions.[110] But the coffee planter made no serious effort to set up an organisation in South India to look after the recruitment and conveyance of labour. The kanganies were left free of any control or supervision in their recruiting activities in South India. As a result the kanganies had almost a monopoly over the supply of labour to the coffee plantations.

In the 1890s, with the heavy demand for labour due to the rapid expansion of the tea industry, the kanganies' monopolistic control over the supply of labour came to be most adversely felt by the tea planters. There was an unprecedented rise in the rates of advances demanded by the kanganies to procure labour from South India. In the 1890s the average rate of advances doubled that of the late 1870s.[111] As we have seen already, the heavy coast advances obtained by the kanganies were not always utilized for the legitimate purpose of recruiting labourers. The tea planters gradually felt the need to set up an organisation in South India to supervise the activities of the kanganies and also to undertake the responsibility of disbursing the coast advances. The change in the planter-kangany relationship from that which prevailed in the coffee period is also important in this respect. Most of the coffee estates

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109. Annual general meeting of PAC, 17 February 1897, PPAC 1898, p. 33. AR of AGA. Mannar District, CAR 1892, pp. D29-D30.

110. In 1899, a Sub-Agency was set up in Tuticorin with a medical officer in charge. But both the Agency and the Sub-Agency were understaffed.

111. See below, pp. 148, 154.

were managed by proprietor-planters and they had a relatively close personal relationship with their kanganies. In fact, most of the coffee estates had their own favourite villages from which they annually obtained labour with the help of the kanganies who had long established contacts with these estates. This situation had changed by the 1890^{s}. The depression in the coffee industry during the 1880^{s} disturbed this relationship to some extent. Of greater significance was the change in the management of the tea plantations. The bulk of the tea estates were owned by Companies and were managed by superintendents appointed by them. These superintendents were shuttled between Company estates from time to time and were less personally committed to the estates than the proprietor-planters of the coffee period. It also appears that the tea planter was, on the whole, a busier person than the coffee planter. The tea planters began to look for administrative measures to bring about some control over the activities of the kanganies. Besides, the general increase in migration during the 1890^{s} tended to increase the incidence of abuses such as kidnapping, extortion, and bolting of labourers. Extortion was heaviest in South India where the subordinate Government employees such as police constables, railway station masters, ticket office clerks, and porters frequently indulged in the practice of extorting money from the labourers who passed between the villages in South India and the plantations in Ceylon. Furthermore, some organisation was necessary to check bolting of kanganies and labourers from the estates to South India. It was also felt that once some organisation was set up in South India it could also do the work of providing the planters with periodic information on the prospects of recruiting, publicise the conditions of estate work, examine the prospective emigrants on their suitability for agricultural work, and also undertake the conveyance of labourers to the estates. There was the wider factor that on the whole the tea industry, particularly with the formation of the limited liability tea companies in the late 1890^{s}, became a more organised venture than the coffee industry of the previous decades.

Besides, the demand for labour throughout the year on the tea plantations made the setting up of a permanent organisation in South India to deal with the supply of labour an essential and a worthwhile undertaking. It is also worth noting that the absolute number of workers in demand for the tea enterprise was greater than the demand for labour in the coffee industry in the Island.

Encouraged by the above stated factors, the idea of setting up a labour organisation in South India was considered by the planting circles from time to time throughout the 1890s.[112] However, it was only with the turn of the century that the planters made a determined effort to inaugurate an institution with a view to increase the supply of immigrant labour to the plantations. Three factors were particularly responsible in firmly committing the planters to evolve such an organisation. After 1900 the Malayan rubber planter became a serious competitor for South Indian labour. The Malayan planters were setting up their own organisation in South India to intensify their labour recruiting activities. It became clear to the Ceylon planters that the absence of a labour recruiting organisation of their own in South India tended to hamper the supply of labour to the Island and that this situation would eventually lead to a further increase in the rates of advances paid to the kanganies to procure labour--rates which had already taken an upward trend during the "tea boom" in the 1890s.[113] Secondly, in the years after 1897, the tea industry in the Island was in state of slump. Consequently, the need to obtain cheap labour was most strongly felt by the planters. Finally, the condition of the tea industry together with the occurrence of a series of favourable agricultural seasons in South India in the years from 1902 to 1904

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112. 'Cooly Labour', by Hints, COO, 6 May 1895.
'Coolies and their Advances', by South of Kandy, ibid., 23 April 1895.
A general meeting of Ambegamuwa DPA, ibid., 18 May 1895.

113. See below, pp. 153-155.

discouraged labour migration to the Island.[114] Consequently, the planters faced the problem of scarcity of labour particularly during the peak season on the estates in the years 1902-4 at a time when they could ill-afford to bear a high cost of labour. The problem became all the more acute in view of the gradual increase in the acreage under a new crop— rubber, and the planting circles appear to have been beset with a gloomy future as regards their supply of labour.

Inspired by these factors two major institutional changes were brought about in our period. The first of the these changes was introduced by the Colonial Government in 1901 when it began the Tin Ticket System with a view to solve at least some of the problems connected with the conveyance of immigrant labour. The essence of the system was the assumption by the Government of the responsibility of conveying the immigrant labourers from the Government Immigrant Camp at Tataparai in South India to the railway station nearest to the plantation of their destination. The expenses involved in the transportation of the labourers were initially incurred by the Government and were subsequently recovered from the planters. The planters in turn debited the cost to the labourer.[115]

The scheme was optional to the planters. Every estate which joined the scheme was allotted a number. This number together with a letter denoting the planting district in which the estate was situated was punched on a small metal disc known as the Tin Ticket. Thus, the Tin Ticket virtually contained the address of the estate to which the Tin Ticket belonged. The Tin Tickets were supplied to the planters by the Government and were available at the provincial Government Kachcheries. The planters issued the Tin Tickets to the kanganies going to South India to recruit labour and also to the individual labourers going on short

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114. See below, pp. 124, 126-127, 158-159.

115. Forty-seventh AnR of PAC, PPAC 1901, pp. 19-21.
Forty-eighth AnR of PAC, YPAC 1901-1902, pp. 15-16.
'The Tin Ticket System', ibid., Appendix D, pp. 39-41.

visits to India. Every labourer travelling on the scheme had to carry his Tin Ticket on his person. On his journey from South India to the estate each immigrant labourer had to present his Tin Ticket at Tataparai Camp. On the strength of the Tin Ticket he was despatched by steamer to Colombo where he was met on board by the Government Immigration Agent, who forwarded him to the Ragama Camp. On his arrival at Ragama, the Camp despatched a telegram to the Superintendent of the estate to which the immigrant was destined to travel notifying the immigrant's departure from the Camp two days later. During the two days the immigrant was detained under observation at Ragama. He was provided with a rail ticket to travel from Ragama to the planting district. Each gang of Tin Ticket labourers was entrusted to the care of a special peon who was responsible for the safe delivery of the gang at the rail station nearest to the estate. Throughout the journey from Tataparai the Tin Ticket immigrant was fed and maintained by the Government. Thus, the mere possession of the Tin Ticket enabled the immigrant to reach the estate without any financial transaction on his journey.[116]

The scheme spelled several merits both to the planter and the labourer. It enabled the planter to keep a check on the advances given out to the kanganies going to South India to fetch new labourers.[117] Henceforth, cash advances had to be given to the kanganies only for the purpose of recruiting and conveying the labourers up to Tataparai. To cover the rest of the journey the kanganies were not given cash but the Tin Tickets instead. Thus, the system helped to curtail the abuses practised by the kanganies to retain a portion of the travelling expenses of the labourers. The system secured the safe arrival of the labourer on his estate with the minimum delay. The planters paid the travelling

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116. Forty-seventh AnR of PAC, PPAC 1901, pp. 19-21.
The system was described as one of 'value-payable post', the labourer being the package to be delivered and his address being contained on the Tin Ticket.

117. Forty-ninth AnR of PAC, YPAC 1902-1903, p. 12.

expenses only for those labourers who were actually obtained by them on the system and therefore had no risk of incurring unnecessary expenditure. Since the system enabled the labourers to travel without themselves indulging in cash transactions in buying steamer and rail tickets, it minimized the risk of extortion en route. The kanganies who had now to handle a portion of the coast advances in Tin Tickets were disgruntled with the new system.[118] The decision of the Government to restrict the concession rates on the Ceylon Government Railway to the Tin Ticket immigrants effectively circumvented the kanganies' opposition to the system.[119]

The Tin Ticket system was enthusiatically taken up by the planters.[120] Within months of its introduction the number of immigrants travelling on Tin Tickets increased heavily.[121] The success of the scheme is revealed in the statistics on the progressive increase in the use of the system as set out in Table 2.4.

The second major institutional change in our period was the inauguration of the Ceylon Labour Commission in South India in 1904. This was a private organisation set up at the initiative of the Ceylon Planters' Association. The operation of the Commission was directed by a Commissioner with the headquarters at Trichinopoly and sub-agencies scattered in the South Indian districts which supplied labour to the plantations. At the inauguration of the Commission in 1904 five sub-agencies were established in Tinnevelly, Madura, Dindigual, Atur, and Mayaveram.[122] By 1910 the work of the Commission had expanded so rapidly that there were 23 sub-agencies in almost all the Tamil districts of the Madras

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118. 'Tin Ticket System', by the Col. Sec., COW, 25 July 1902. Editorial, ibid., 27 July 1902.

119. Ibid. 'The New Regulations', YPAC 1902-1903, Appendix D, pp. 37-40.

120. AnRs of DPAs published in the COW from 14 January 1902 to 24 February 1902.

121. According to Governor Ridgeway, the number of estate labourers travelling on Tin Tickets rose from 2 per cent of the total number of immigrants in January 1902 to 38 per cent in June, to 59 per cent in November and to 75 per cent in July 1903.

122. Fifty-first AnR of PAC, Appendix D, Report of CLC from June to December 1904, YPAC 1904-1905.

Presidency.[123] The Commission was financed by a cess of 10 cents per acre subscribed by the estates which joined the scheme and an annual Government grant of one-fourth of the total cost of maintenance of the Commission.

The main object of the scheme was to supervise and assist the kanganies in the recruitment and conveyance of labour and provide them with the necessary finances for these activities.[124] All cash advances sent to South India by the estates subscribing to the Commission were handled by the Commission. It is important to describe the system by which these functions were carried out.[125] Money intended to be given out as advances were sent by the estates direct to the Commission. The planters had to provide the Commission with the necessary information regarding the kanganies and also inform the amount of advances to be given to them. When leaving the estate for South India the kanganies were given only a small sum of money sufficient to cover their actual expenses. On arrival in South India the kanganies had to present the employers' instructions to the sub-agency nearest to their village.[126] The kanganies were thereafter issued with recruiting certificates and also small amounts of money as preliminary advances. On the return of the kanganies to the sub-agency with their recruits, the kanganies were given the full amount of the advances which their employers had instructed to be paid to them. In the presence of the Agent of the Commission each kangany had to pay his recruits what was due to them. The recruits signed Promissory Notes in favour of their kangany and the latter gave a Promissory Note for the full amount given to him in favour of the Commissioner who sent both the Promissory Notes

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123. AnR of CLC for 1910, YPAC 1910, p. 6.

124. Col. Sec. of Ceylon to Chief Sec. of Madras, 20 June 1904, MPP, Vol. 6894, Pro. Nos. 567-568 of 1 July 1904.

125. 'Labour Scheme', YPAC 1904-1905, pp. 50d-50e.
Fifty-first AnR of PAC, Appendix D, Report of CLC from June to December 1904, ibid.
AnRs of CLC, (annual series, 1905-1910), YPAC.

126. These instructions were set out in a printed form known as the 'A' Form. See Appendix B.

to the estate superintendent in Ceylon. Thus, the scheme was primarily meant to keep a check on the disbursement of coast advances in South India--a task which had hitherto remained exclusively in the hands of the kanganies much to the detriment of both the planters and the labourers.

The Ceylon Labour Commission also had to perform several other functions.[127] The Commission undertook the task of disseminating information among the South Indian villagers on the conditions of work in the plantations in Ceylon. Leaflets printed in the vernaculars were periodically distributed. The Commission also took steps to curtail the extortion of labourers en route and to prevent the recruits from being misled. The Agents examined the labourers to ascertain that the labourers understood the conditions of work on the estates and also to check whether the law against kidnapping and abduction had been infringed by the recruiters. The Commission also undertook the task of tracing and recovering those kanganies and labourers who had deserted to South India without paying off their debts due to the estates.

The statistics on the working of the Commission in the period from 1904 to 1910 reveal a gradual increase in the number of labourers recruited by the kanganies working under its supervision. However, until 1910 a substantial number of the labourers were still recruited by the kanganies working independent of the control of the Commission. The relatively slow progress of the Commission in the early years of its existence was not due to any inherent virtue of kangany system though some planters who had fairly long established personal contacts with their kanganies found them trustworthy and capable of doing the necessary recruiting independent of the Commission. A large number of the new rubber estates planted in the post-1904 rubber boom was still not bearing and therefore the rubber planters were not very eager to join the Commission the membership of which entailed the payment of an annual

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127. AnR of CLC for 1906, YPAC 1906, p. 15.
AnR of CLC for 1907, ibid., 1907, pp. 12-13.

TABLE 2.4 Plantation labour immigration to Ceylon under the Tin Ticket System and the Ceylon Labour Commission up to 1910.

Year	Percentage of the Tin Ticket labourers to the total estate labour immigrants	Percentage of the Labour Commission labourers to the total estate labour immigrants
1902	40	
1903	71	
1904	80	
1905	86	31
1906	81	34
1907	79	41
1908	83	53
1909	85	44
1910	85	70

Sources: AR of Superintendent, Ragama Camp, (1902-1911), CAR.
AnR of CLC (1905-1911), YPAC.

acreage cess. Besides, the Labour Scheme had to get itself organised in South India. The kangany system was well entrenched in the field. It is likely that some of the kanganies would have resisted coming under the new scheme. The period from 1904 to 1910 was in fact one of transition when the kangany system was gradually brought under the control of the Commission. By 1910, 70 per cent of the immigrant estate labourers were coming under the Labour Scheme and in the decade after 1910 the average annual immigration under the Scheme increased to 85 per cent of the total estate labour immigration to the Island.

The Tin Ticket System and the Ceylon Labour Commission undoubtedly brought about improvements in the methods of recruitment and conveyance of labourers. Nevertheless, the fundermental problem of the labourers in this respect, namely, the debiting of the cost of the recruitment and

transportation of the labourers against their estate accounts persisted. No effort was made to relieve the labourers from the initial burden of debt with which they started their lives on the estates. Besides, the amount debited in this manner against each labourer was the total amount per recruit handed to the kangany out of which only a portion was actually spent on each recruit. The liability of the immigrant labourers who came to Ceylon to pay back the cost of recruitment and conveyance contrasted with the position of the immigrant labourers who migrated to other countries. The planters of the countries which recruited under the indenture system were bound by the Indian Emigration Ordinances to provide free transport to their recruits. The only country outside British India which imported immigrant labour on an unrestricted basis, besides Ceylon, was Malaya. In 1907, the Malayan employers of free Indian immigrant labourers inaugurated a scheme to recruit and transport labourers from India free of cost to the labourers. The Malayan scheme aroused interest among several planters in Ceylon who suggested a similar scheme for immigrants coming to Ceylon.[128] But the suggestion was eventually dropped. Thus, outside British India, the Ceylon planters were the only employers of Indian labour who charged directly the cost of passage from the labourers.

The relative proximity of the Island to South India made the problem of the cost of passage financially less burdensome in case of Ceylon than in other countries. The employers, however, were disinclined to provide free transport to the labourers. This attitude of the planters could be attributed to two factors. First, under the system of "free labour" which existed in Ceylon where the labourer unlike under the indenture system had the right to quit his employer at one month's notice, the only practical hold the employer had over his labourer was that of

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128. Fifty-fourth AnR of PAC, YPAC 1907, p. 99.
AnR of CLC for 1906, ibid. 1906, p. 18.
Annual general meeting of PAC, 14 February 1908, ibid.1907, pp. 82-85.

the latter's debt to the former. Free passage would have done away with the initial debt of the labourer to the employer and thereby undermined the employer's only effective hold on the labourer. This explanation is supported by the views expressed by some planters of their willingness to provide free passage on condition that the immigrant labourers were bound to serve the employer for a specified period.[129] Secondly, on the whole, the employers of immigrant labour in Ceylon did not face an acute shortage of labour for any prolonged period.[130] They found in South India a potential source of surplus labour and had less to worry about their labour supply than the employers of Indian immigrant labour in other countries which were situated at a distance from India. Thus, whereas the question of providing free passage to the labourers with a view to give them the opportunity of beginning their lives on the estates free of debt was openly debated towards the later years of our period, the suggestion did not find strong support among the employers. When a scheme providing free transport facilities for the labourers was finally adopted in Ceylon at a much later date, in 1923, it was mainly due to the intervention of the Indian Government which acted under the pressure of Indian nationalist opinion to safeguard the interest of the Indian emigrant labourers and to improve their conditions.[131]

It could be concluded that in the sphere of recruitment and conveyance of labour no serious effort was made by the planters to tackle the basic problem of the labourers. Instead, all institutional changes brought about by the planters were directed at obtaining their supply of labour as cheaply and as expeditiously as possible. To this end, schemes were formulated to check the rise in the rates of coast advances, to improve the means of conveyance, and to bring the kangany's monopoly over the

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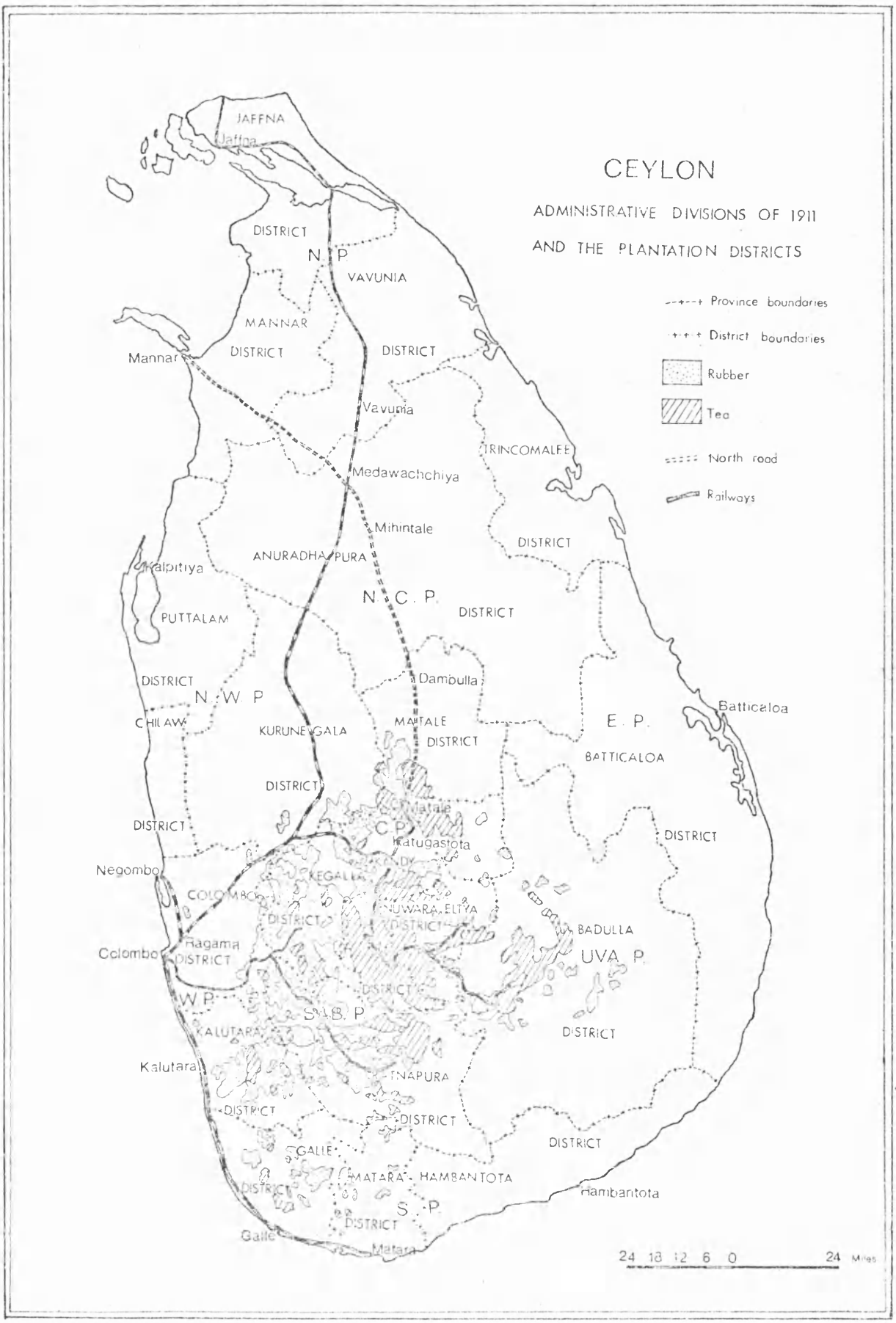
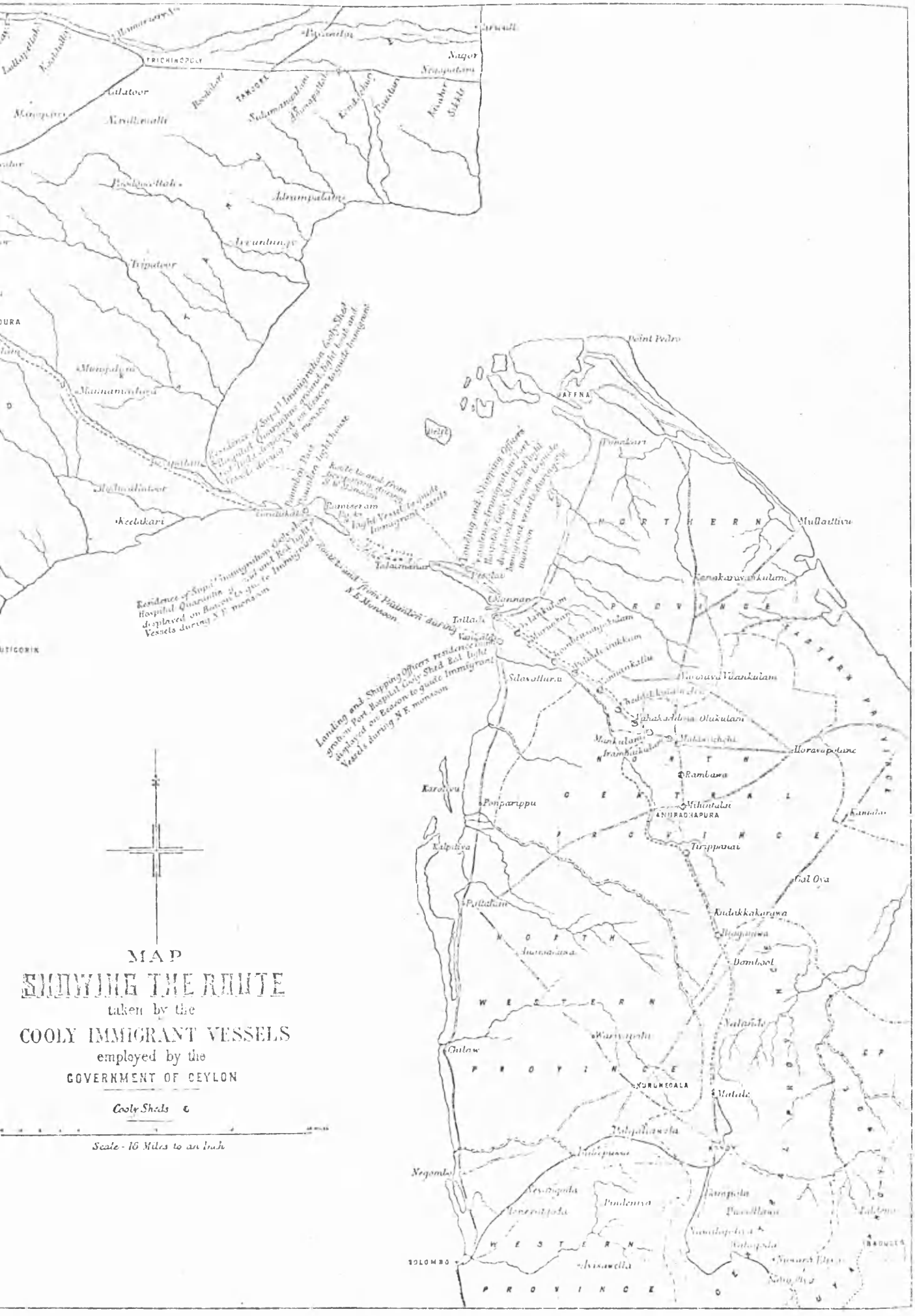
129. Ibid., pp. 86-87.

130. See below, chap. 3.

131. Report of the Controller of Indian Immigrant Labour, CAR 1923, pp. R3-R8.

supply of labour under institutional control and supervision. These in turn no doubt had the effect of improving the position of the labourer, particularly vis-a-vis his kangany. Though some irregularities in recruiting labour, especially as regards the payment of coast advances to recruits still persisted yet these abuses were kept under restraint. But the basic weakness of the system of recruitment and conveyance of binding the immigrant labourer to an initial dead-weight of indebtedness persisted.


CEYLON
ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISIONS OF 1911
AND THE PLANTATION DISTRICTS
Province boundaries
District boundaries
Rubber
Tea
North road
Railways
JAFFNA
Jaffna
DISTRICT
N. P.
VAVUNIA
MANNAR
DISTRICT
Mannar
DISTRICT
Vavuniya
TRINCOMALEE
Medawachchiya
Mihintale
DISTRICT
ANURADHAPURA
Kalpitiya
N. C. P.
DISTRICT
PUTTALAM
DISTRICT
Dambulla
N. W. P.
Batticaloa
CHILAW
KURUNEGALA
MATALE
DISTRICT
E. P.
BATTICALOA
DISTRICT
Matale
DISTRICT
C. P.
Katugastota
DISTRICT
Negombo
KEGALLA
KANDY
COLOMBO
DISTRICT
NUWARA ELIYA
DISTRICT
BADULLA
Colombo
Ragama
DISTRICT
UVA P.
W. P.
DISTRICT
S. B. P.
KALUTARA
DISTRICT
Kalutara
TNAPURA
DISTRICT
DISTRICT
GALLE
MATARA
HAMBANTOTA
DISTRICT
S. P.
Hambantota
DISTRICT
Galle
Matara
24 18 12 6 0 24 Miles



MAP
SHOWING THE ROUTE
taken by the
COOLY IMMIGRANT VESSELS
employed by the
GOVERNMENT OF CEYLON

Cooly Sheds ©

Scale - 16 Miles to an Inch

CHAPTER III

THE SUPPLY OF IMMIGRANT PLANTATION LABOUR, 1880-1910

In section 1 of the present chapter we hope to analyse the available data on the numerical size and the composition of the immigrant labour force in the Island. This will be followed in section 2 by an attempt to explain the cyclical and annual fluctuations in the migration of labour, by relating these fluctuating trends to the economic background in South India and the plantation sector in the Island. Section 3 will be devoted to the overall state of the demand and supply of immigrant plantation labour in our period. We will at the outset explain the methods we hope to utilize in analysing the adequacy of the plantation labour supply. Thereafter we will apply the aforesaid methods of analysis to the period 1880-1910 in chronological order. An examination of these factors leads us to the conclusion that the plantation sector in the Island did not suffer a permanent shortage of labour. Labour scarcity, when it did occur, was seasonal. Such seasonal shortage of labour was, by and large, confined to the years of good agricultural harvests in South India, suggesting that the plantation labour system in the Island depended to a substantial extent on the agricultural distress in South India for an adequate supply of labour.

1. Components of immigration

A major problem besetting a researcher on plantation labour migration to Ceylon is that of ascertaining the numerical components of migration. For our period it is impossible to obtain accurate statistical information on the migration of Indian plantation workers between South India and Ceylon. By contrast, in countries where the labourers were recruited on an indenture basis, fairly accurate statistics were

maintained under the Indian Emigration Ordinances. Where migration was unrestricted as between Ceylon and India, there was no official stipulation obliging the maintenance of seperate statistics on the migration of Indian labourers. Nevertheless, from the available statistical data it is possible to delineate the general pattern of the immigration of labourers from South India to the plantations in the Island. We hope to devote some attention in the present section to sort out the complicated plethora of statistical material available to us.[1]

All available statistical information on the migration between Ceylon and South India can be placed in four broad categories. The annual Administration Reports of the Madras Emigration Department and the annual Administration Reports of the Registrar General, on Vital Statistics of Ceylon up to 1907 (after 1907 the latter seems to have confined its data to the estate labourers) contain the grand totals of all types of immigrants and emigrants who passed between Ceylon and South India, viz., plantation labourers, non-plantation labourers, traders, and miscellaneous passengers.[2] Since these reports do not distinguish between the different categories of migrants, these two sources are not of much direct use for our study.

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1. In the past, writers on Indian labour migration to Ceylon have paid little attention to the quantitative aspect of the plantation labour migration. (I. H. Vanden Driesen, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, London, 1954; S. Rajaratnam, unpublished M.Sc. thesis, London, 1961: C. Colaco, unpublished M.Sc. thesis, London, 1957; Benedicte Hjejle, 1967; Donald R. Snodgrass, 1966). They have tended to take the gross migration figures of practically all types of migrants between India and Ceylon as given either in the ARs of the Registrar General, on Vital Statistics of Ceylon or in Ferguson's Ceylon Directory and Handbook (series). There isaconsiderable gap between the gross migration figures and the plantation labour migration figures that a researcher could get into serious analytical difficulties by making use of the gross migration figures to analyse problems relating to plantation labour migration. For an intensive study of the question of plantation labour migration, especially the supply-demand situation of labour, the statistical picture needs to be placed in a more realistic form. The discussion in the present section is an attempt in this direction.

2. ARs of the Madras Emigration Department, (annual series, 1885-1910), in IEP and MBRP, (Seperate Revenue Proceedings).
ARs of the Registrar General, on Vital Statistics of Ceylon, (annual series, 1880-1910), CAR.

Secondly, monthly statistics compiled by the Assistant Government Agent, Mannar, are available on the arrivals and departures of Indian men, women, and children via Mannar.[3] These statistics are fairly reliable because the Immigration Establishment at Mannar took an interest in the migrants, particularly with a view to minimize the threat which the immigration of South Indians poised to the health of the Island. Besides, the Paumben-Mannar ferry transport service run by the Ceylon Government was a source of revenue to the Immigration Department. The need to collect ferry fares influenced the Mannar officials to maintain fairly accurate statistics. However, all the migrants who passed Mannar were not estate labourers. Some of them came to participate in the pearl fishery off the north-west coast of the Island. A few travelled by this route to work on the Ceylon Government public works, particularly irrigation works in the North Western and North Central Provinces of the Island. It is not possible to know the precise number of immigrants who travelled via Mannar to the plantations. However, it is clear that the number of non-estate labourers who passed Mannar were not very large and that the bulk of the immigrants who took this route were plantation workers. Therefore, the Mannar figures can be reckoned as fairly indicative of the general pattern of migration of the estate labourers using this route.

The Principal Collector of Customs also maintained statistics on the number of arrivals and departures of Indian men, women, and children via Colombo.[4] Here again, like the Mannar statistics, the Colombo statistics do not distinguish between the estate labourers and the other migrants. But, unlike the Mannar statistics, the totals of Colombo statistics cannot be utilized in a study of the trends of

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3. ARs of AGA, Mannar District, (annual series, 1880-1910), CAR. Monthly Statistics of Arrivals and Departures of Coolies, by the Principal Collector of Customs, Colombo, CGG.

4. Ibid.

migration of estate labourers because the number of non-estate immigrants who entered the Island in Colombo was fairly heavy.[5] However, with the help of three other groups of statistics it is possible to identify the approximate number of estate labourers who arrived in Colombo in the years after 1889. (a) From 1889 the Superintendent of Immigration, Colombo, published bi-annual statistics on the number of Indian immigrant men, women, children, and infants who went to the estates via Colombo.[6] (b) From 1900 we have the statistics maintained by the Ragama Camp on the total number of Indian immigrants who passed through the Camp to the plantations each year.[7] Since all immigrant plantation workers had compulsorily to go through the Camp these statistics can be regarded as fairly accurate. (c) The Ceylon Government Immigration Agents at Tuticorin, Tondi, Ammapatam, and Paumben kept records of the number of people who embarked at these ports for the plantations in Ceylon.[8] These figures closely tally with the statistics given by the Superintendent of Immigration, Colombo, and the Superintendent of the Ragama Camp. However, it is not possible to obtain statistics on the number of estate labourers who returned to South India via Colombo. Only the totals of all types of people who went from Ceylon to India are available except for the years 1900-1 for which the number of estate labourers who returned to India via Colombo is available.[9]

Finally, at the minor ports of Negambo and Kalpitiya, the Sub-Collectors of Customs maintained data on immigration and emigration

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5. Returns of Immigrants in the Port of Colombo, showing their destination, trade, and occupation, (published bi-annually), by the Superintendent of Immigration, Colombo, CGG.

6. Notes and Comments, COO, 19 January 1891.
Editorial, ibid., 23 January 1891.

7. ARs of GA. WP., enclosures, AnRs of the Superintendent of Ragama Camp, (annual series, 1900-10), CAR.

8. Returns of Estate Coolies shipped to Colombo during each half year, showing the ports of embarkation, compiled by the Assistant Superintendent of Immigration, Paumben, CGG.

9. Weekly Returns of Immigration and Emigration at the Port of Colombo, by the Acting Master Attendent, (published weekly, 1900-1), CGG.

via these two ports.[10] But the number of migrants who travelled through these ports were negligible, hardly aggregating a couple of hundreds in any year in our period. Besides, these statistics do not distinguish between estate and non-estate migrants. With the restriction of Indian labour migration to the Tuticorin-Colombo route after the establishment of the Ragama Camp in 1897, immigration via these minor ports became virtually non-extinct. Due to these reasons we have omitted immigration via these two minor ports in compiling our Table 3.1 on the immigration of plantation labour.[11]

For purpose of analysis, in Table 3.1, we have set out, in round figures, the approximate number of adult Indians who came to the Island to work on the estates. The statistics after 1900 can be reckoned as fair indicators of the trend. In the statistics up to 1899 there is a certain percentage of error which cannot be accurately determined. But the error does not seriously handicap our analysis of the trends of plantation labour migration in these years, because the points at which the error occurs are of relatively minor significance. The error occurs at two points. The statistics for the years 1880-99 include non-estate immigrants who entered the Island via Mannar. But this section, as we have seen earlier on, was relatively small. Secondly, up to 1888, Table 3.1 does not include the estate labourers who arrived in Colombo, for it is not possible to obtain seperate statistics in this respect. But here too, the number of estate labourers who used the Colombo route in the years up to 1890 was not large. For instance in 1889 at a time when the Colombo route was beginning to be popular only about 4000 estate labourers came via Colombo as against 34,000 by the Mannar route.

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10. Monthly Statistics of Arrivals and Departures of Coolies, by the Principal Collector Of Customs, Colombo, CGG.

11. There is the possibility that some immigrants would have escaped official attention. However, such unrecorded migration could not have been very large in the years 1880-1910, for it did not attract serious official attention at a time when the Ceylon Government was watchful about the danger of the possible introduction of small pox, cholera, and plague from India.

TABLE 3.1 Approximate number of adult plantation labour immigrants, 1880-1910

Year	Immigrants	Year	Immigrants
1880	20,300	1896	74,500
1881	26,800	1897	100,900
1882	25,900	1898	75,700
1883	15,200	1899	20,300
1884	19,900	1900	101,600
1885	23,000	1901	39,100
1886	17,400	1902	28,600
1887	22,800	1903	40,100
1888	50,000	1904	51,400
1889	36,900	1905	109,200
1890	50,400	1906	70,900
1891	65,700	1907	N
1892	71,400	1908	73,800
1893	47,900	1909	66,700
1894	43,600	1910	N
1895	67,500		

Sources: ARs of AGA. Mannar District, (annual series, 1880-1900), CAR.
Monthly Statistics of Arrivals and Departures of Coolies, by the Principal Collector of Customs, Colombo, CGG.
Returns of Immigrants in the Port of Colombo, showing their destination, trade, and occupation, published bi-annually, by Superintendent of Immigration, CGG

N:- No information available.

A certain number of labourers trekked back to their villages in South India, some of them on temporary sojourn. There were no legal impediments for the labourers to do so except giving one month's notice to the employer. But for most of the labourers there was a practical difficulty because of their debts to the kangany and the planter. However, it was possible for at least a section of the indebted labour force to go back to South India, particularly during slack months in the estates. For the employer there were two sources of security for such indebted

labourers who went to South India on short visits. First, there was the kangany. The kangany was legally bound to the estate for all advances given by the employer; and the personal relationship between the kangany and the outgoing labourer and the customary sanctions ensured the latter's return to the estate. More important, there was a generally accepted arrangement that only some members of the indebted families should be allowed to go on short visits to South India to ensure their return. The debt of a labourer was considered as a collective debt of the family or the labour gang and not an individual debt. Even when a labourer died his debt was added to the total debt of his family. The planters had no serious objections to some of the labourers going to the "Coast" particularly during the months of "short work" in the estates. In fact, the planters correctly viewed the facility for visits to South India as a major attraction of the Ceylon plantation labour system--a facility which they felt should not be disturbed.

The available data on the back-flow of immigrant labour from Ceylon is incomplete. The cumulative totals of the Ceylon Government gross emigration-immigration statistics on all types of Indian migrants for the period from 1880 to 1910 show a migrational surplus of about 26 per cent in favour of Ceylon over the entire period.

As regards plantation labour migration, the above trend of the back-flow can be known only by comparing the annual immigration statistics with the available statistics on the annual growth rate of the work force. Some idea of the latter can be known from the Quarterly Returns which the planters were obliged to submit to the Government on the numerical strength of the labour force on each estate. The District-wise totals of these Returns were consistently published in the Ceylon Government Gazette. The Quarterly Returns were underestimates for these did not include two groups of labourers. First, the basis of the Quarterly Returns was estate Check-rolls which did not include statistics on contract- and child-labour. Secondly, only the estates of 10 acres and above were

expected to submit such Returns. However, these two groups who happened to be omitted from the Quarterly Returns were not numerically large, and the great majority of the immigrant plantation workers were registered in the Check-rolls. Besides, the Quarterly Returns are the only consistently maintained data available to us on the growth of the labour force.[12] On the basis of the data available in these Returns we have compiled Table 3.2.[13]

While the average annual inflow of adult labourers to the plantations during the period 1880-1910 approximated 50,000 the average annual increase of the immigrant plantation work force in the same period appears to have been about 9,000. The latter included additions to the labour force by natural increase of the Indian labour population in the Island.[14] However, the gap between the labour immigration rate and the labour force growth rate should, in fact, be less than indicated above. This is partly because of the omissions from the Check-rolls (as indicated in the previous paragraph) and partly because the average annual number of immigrants given above as 50,000 includes the kanganies who went to and fro between South India and Ceylon to fetch new gangs of labourers.[15] Death accounts for a certain percentage of the difference between the rate of

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12. Statistics on the wage earning classes on the plantation are also available in the Census Reports. But the census returns of the immigrant plantation workers fell short of the statistics in the Quarterly Returns. This difference can be explained on two grounds. It is likely that the Check-rolls included the names of kanganies and labourers who were away in South India on short visits. Besides, the size of an estate was differently defined in the collection of the two sets of statistics. Quarterly Returns were collected from estates of 10 acres and above whereas the census statistics were collected from estates of 20 acres and above.

13. Quarterly Abstracts of Cooly Labour on Estates in the several provinces compiled by the Col. Sec., published quarterly in CGG.

14. According to census statistics, in 1901 and 1911, the Ceylon born Indian Tamil estate population approximated 14 and 20 per cent respectively to the total Indian Tamil estate population in Ceylon.
Ceylon Census Report, 1901, Vol. II, pp. 620ff.
Ibid., 1911, Vol. on population by sex etc., pp. 368ff.

15. According to the evidence available for the years 1912-20, it appears that approximately 15-20 per cent of the adult plantation immigrants were kanganies.

TABLE 3.2 Estate Check-roll returns of the number of immigrant plantation labourers in the Island, 1880-1910

Year	Number of labourers
1880	101,488
1881	99,593
1882	85,948
1883	86,475
1884	96,913
1885	87,192
1886	114,690
1887	143,053
1888	163,389
1889	163,963
1890	186,840
1891	194,321
1892	235,117
1893	231,550
1894	219,206
1895	236,640
1896	257,256
1897	298,405
1898	306,272
1899	296,900
1900	337,278
1901	308,925
1902	300,857
1903	299,908
1904	309,964
1905	362,914
1906	372,195
1907	366,148
1908	371,797
1909	404,739
1910	409,914

Source: Quarterly Abstract of Cooly Labour on Estates in the several Provinces, compiled by the Col. Sec., published in CGG.

immigration and the labour force growth rate. But the loss on this account is difficult to appraise due to the lack of satisfactory data on the crude death rate among the immigrants workers.[16] However, the main reason for the gap between the annual rate of immigration and the annual growth rate of the labour force was the return of a certain percentage of the immigrant labourers to South India. Despite this back-flow, there was a large increase in the work force in our period. The annual growth of the labour force was steady, except for the years 1880-5 when the economic catastrophe which occurred in the Island in these years placed net-migration in favour of India. Those who remained in the Island during 1880-5 did so under harsh economic circumstances in the plantations and despite relatively favourable agricultural conditions in South India in these years. The Indian labourers who remained in the Island during these hard times can be generally regarded as those who had by then developed some permanent association with the planting districts.

It is difficult to know the proportion of the "old" immigrants among those who annually arrived in Ceylon. Qualitative evidence available towards the end of our period suggests that a considerable number of immigrants at that time were those who had been in the Island previously.[17] The earliest year for which statistical data are available on this count is 1917. In that year it was recorded that approximately 63 per cent of the labour immigrants were "old" immigrants.[18]

The bulk of the immigrant plantation workers appear to have come from the southernmost Tamil districts of the Madras Presidency, viz., Trichinopoly, Tinnevelly, Madura, and Tanjore. There are very few statistical

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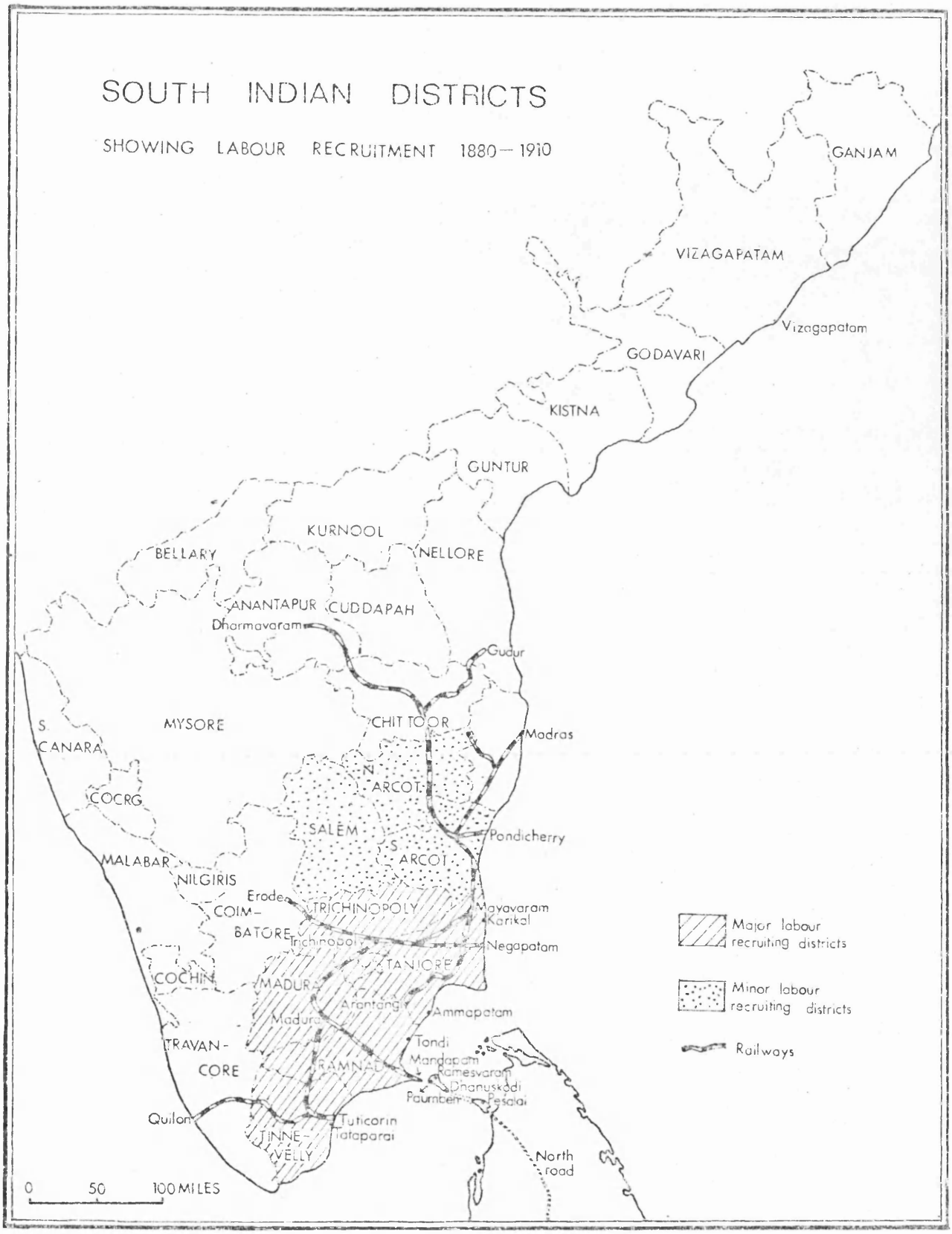
16. See below, p. 258.

17. AR of GA. WP., enclosure, AnR of Superintendent of Ragama Camp, CAR 1904, p. 47.
Ibid., p. A6.

18. AnR of CLC for 1917, YPAC 1917, p. 21.


SOUTH INDIAN DISTRICTS
SHOWING LABOUR RECRUITMENT 1880—1910
GANJAM
VIZAGAPATAM
Vizagapatam
GODAVARI
KISTNA
GUNTUR
KURNOOL
NELLORE
BELLARY
ANANTAPUR
CUDDAPAH
Dharmavaram
Gudur
MYSORE
S. CANARA
CHITTOOR
Madras
N. ARCOT
COORG
SALEM
S. ARCOT
Pondicherry
MALABAR
NILGIRIS
Erode
COIM-BATORE
TRICHINOPOLY
Mayavaram
Karikal
Trichinopoly
Negapatam
TANJORE
COCHIN
MADURA
Arantangi
Ammapatam
Madura
Tondi
TRAVAN-CORE
RAMNAD
Mandapam
Rameswaram
Dhanuskodi
Paumben
Pesalai
Quilon
Tuticorin
Tataparai
TINNE-VELLY
North road
0
50
100 MILES
Major labour recruiting districts
Minor labour recruiting districts
Railways

data in this respect up to 1905. Our conclusion for the period up to 1905 is substantially based on the qualitative evidence available in contemporary Madras and Ceylon documents.[19] For the period after 1905 statistical data on the district-wise origin of the immigrants are available as regards those labourers who arrived in Ceylon under the Labour Scheme of the Ceylon Labour Commission. From 1905 to 1910, the number of labourers who came under this Scheme approximated 45 per cent to the total number of plantation labour immigrants in these years. The regional-wise origin of this group is given in column 2 of Table 3.3 below. More comprehensive information is available for the decade after 1910 when approximately 85 per cent of the total plantation labour immigration took place under the Scheme. This information too is set out in the Table. The predominance of immigrants from Trichinopoly, Tinnevelly, Madura, and Tanjore was largely due to the relative proximity of these district to the Island. Besides, the planters, on the whole, concentrated their recruiting activities in these districts. Evidence reveal that the economic factors which propelled emigration from India was considerably strong in these districts. It is evident that with the progress of the tea industry in the Island efforts were made to extend the field of recruitment of labour beyond the traditional districts which supplied labour. Consequently, towards the end of our period a certain percentage of immigration took place from Salem and North and South Arcot. Immigration to Ceylon from the other South Indian districts was negligible.

Some idea of the socio-economic background of the immigrant plantation workers can be gleaned from the statistics maintained by the Ceylon Labour Commission on the South Indian castes to which the immigrants belonged. Here again, we are beset with the problem that this information is confined to the labourers despatched under the Labour Scheme of the of the Commission. However, since the information for the period 1905-10

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19. A general meeting of PAC, 13 June 1891, PPAC 1892, p. 71. ARs of the Emigration Department, Madras, (annual series, 1880-1910), IEP.

can be checked against the more satisfactory data available for the period 1910-20, all available statistics up to 1920 on the caste composition of the immigrants are set out in Table 3.4.

Table 3.4 reveals that a substantial number of the immigrant labourers were drawn from the traditionally landless agricultural labour castes of Pariah and Palla. In the nineteenth century, these castes were increasingly becoming agriculturally unattached and therefore, economically all the more depressed. The Ambalakarans and Vellalas appear to have formed an equally important section of the migratory stream. The members of these two castes were considered, economically and socially, superior to those of the Pariah and Palla castes in that the former were, by tradition, agriculturists who had hereditary rights of owning land. The Ambalakarans and Vellalas were mainly small-scale peasant proprietors whose main traditional economic activity was the cultivation of their own land holdings. In the nineteenth century, some members of these castes either lost their land holdings or found their holdings too small to sustain their families.[20] Either the family as a whole or some members of the family took to part-time work as agricultural labourers. This was particularly so during the off-season in their own plots of land. Information available in the Madras Government documents confirm that the unattached landless agricultural labourers and the small-scale peasants who practised as part-time agricultural labourers formed the most significant segments of the labour emigrants from South India.[21] It is likely that the Vellalas and the Ambalakarans would have formed the bulk of those immigrant labourers who took time off from their work in the plantations to periodically visit their villages in South India. Among the immigrants, the others of numerical importance belonged to the Kallar and the Sakkili

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20. See above, p. 29-30.

21. Collector of Madura to Sec. to the Commissioner of Revenue Settlement, Madras, No. 47 of 5 July 1888, MBRP, Vol. 3319, Pro. No. 345 of 24 July 1888, p. 1.
Report of the Acting Collector of North Arcot, ibid., Vol. 6222, Pro. No. 167 of 5 August 1901, pp. 3-4.

TABLE 3.3 The South Indian districts from which the immigrant labour was drawn for the plantations in Ceylon, 1905-20.

District	For 45 per cent of immigrants in the years 1905-10	For 85 per cent of immigrants in the years 1911-20
Trichinopoly	29	40
Tinnevelly	21	6
Madura	16	13
Tanjore	18	8
Salem	6	5
North Arcot	4	7
South Arcot	2	6
Other districts	4	15

Source: AnR of CLC (annual series, 1905-1920), YPAC.

TABLE 3.4 Showing the percentage distribution of the castes of the immigrants, 1905-20

Caste	For 45 per cent of immigrants in the years 1905-10	For 85 per cent of immigrants in the years 1910-20
Vellala	21	17.5
Ambalakaran	16	17
Pariah	20	23
Pallas	11	15.5
Kallar	6	5.5
Sakkili	3	4
Others (mainly Channar, Vannan, Oddas, and Ambatta)	23	17.5

Source: AnR of CLC (annual series, 1905-1920), YPAC.

castes. These two were among the most depressed castes in South India. While the majority of the immigrant labourers came from the six above named castes, they were supplemented in lesser numbers by others from the lowly South Indian castes such as Channar (toddy taper) Oddas (dhoby) and Ambatta (barber). It appears therefore that the great bulk of the immigrants were drawn either from the lowest wrung of the peasant castes or the economically and socially depressed castes in South India.

Ceylon had the distinct feature among the Indian immigrant receiving-countries of having a system of family migration. In practically all the other countries, including Burma and Malaya, labour migration was predominently a movement of adults, largely of males.[22] The greater distance from South India, the fairly long sea voyage, and the system of recruitment by professional recruiters deterred female migration to other colonies. Besides, in the predominantly sugar and rubber colonies there were only limited employment opportunities for women and even less for children. Recruitment of families involved heavy transport costs and the employers were keen to invest the fairly high travelling expenses of labour on able-bodied males. The predominance of males among the labour immigrants to the distant colonies inevitably created a grave disproportion in the sex composition of the labour community which eventually prompted the Indian Government to introduce legislation in order to ensure a stated sex ratio in the recruitment of immigrant labour.[23] Nevertheless, it was found difficult to recruit individual adult females, for the class of unattached women were relatively few in the Indian society where women married quite early in life. Besides, the unattached Indian females were less prone to migrate in large numbers. The married women were disinclined to migrate to foreign land leaving their family behind. Thus, even if the employers required female labour it would have been difficult to procure

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22. K. S. Sandhu, 1969, pp. 97-99.
C. Kondapi, 1951, pp. 88-92.
E. J. L. Andrew, 1933, chap. XXI.

23. Ibid.

them in adequate numbers without an overall system of recruitment of labour families.

In contrast, in Ceylon, family migration was the back-bone of the system of the recruitment and the system of labour organisation in the plantations. The factors which militated against family migration to other countries did not operate so effectively in case of Ceylon. The distance was short and the travelling expenses were much less than to the other countries. Besides, such expenses though pre-paid by the estates were eventually recouped from the labourers unlike the indenture system. Furthermore, unlike rubber and sugar plantations in places like Malaya, Mauritius, and the West Indies, in the tea plantations in Ceylon work was available for a large force of female and child-labour, especially in tea plucking and weeding.[24] In fact, in such work, the tea planter found female and child-labour cheaper, more efficient, and amenable than male labour. Women formed the main section of the tea plucking labour force and the Ceylon planter unlike his counterparts in other countries encouraged family migration. The system held out several advantages to the immigrants as well. It augmented their family income; and the pooling of family earnings was an important factor which helped them to subsist on a low income.[25] The system naturally meant that the family could live together, besides working under a family head as the sub-kangany. In most of the Indian labour communities abroad there were high incidence of immorality and venereal diseases consequent on the gross disproportion of sexes which prevailed among them. But these problems did not figure among the Indian labour community in Ceylon to the extent they did elsewhere. The labour families arrived in Ceylon with their infants and even with the aged and infirm relatives whom they were accustomed to support. Because of the advantages which the system of family migration held out to the immigrants, the system had a favourable effect on the supply of labour to the estates.

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24. See below, chap. IV.

25. See below, pp. 254-255.

Family life also had a stabilising effect on the labour force on the estates. Table 3.5 gives some idea of the sex-wise composition of the labour population in Ceylon in comparison with several other principal Indian immigrant receiving-countries.

TABLE 3.5 Sex-wise composition of the plantation labour population in Ceylon, Fiji, and Malaya. (Females per 1000 males).

Year	Ceylon	Fiji	Malaya
1901	804	506	
1911	873	545	308

Sources: Ceylon figures are calculated from the Ceylon Census Report, 1901, Vol. II, pp. 598ff and Ceylon Census Report, 1911, Vol. on Population by sex ets. Figures for Fiji are from C. Kondapi, 1951, p. 90. For Malaya the figures are from U. Mahajani, 1960.

2. Fluctuating flow of labour migration and its economic background, 1880-1910

The fluctuations in the migration of plantation labour, indicated in Table 3.1 of the preceding section, were the outcome of the effect of two broad economic factors, namely, the vicissitudes of the extent of employment opportunities in the plantations and also of the fortunes of the economic activities of the peasant agricultural sector in South India. The object of this section is to analyse the nature and the intensity of the impact of these economic factors in shaping the cyclical and annual variations in the migration of labour.

The emigration of Indian labour to the Island, as discussed earlier on, was not a spontaneous movement where the immigrant labourers came on their own. It was rather an organised movement where the estates recruited the prospective emigrants by the offer of monetary advances as inducements to emigrate and thereafter transported them to the estates.

Thus, the migration of labour was closely affected by the state of demand for labour which manifested itself in the recruiting activities of the planters. While the recruiting efforts were intensified in seasons of heavy demand for labour, such activities subsided during the slack seasons in the plantation agriculture in the Island.

The response of the prospective emigrant to the overtures of the recruiter hinged largely on the strength of the current economic pressures on him, which determined the attraction of accepting the monetary advances in return for performing manual labour in a foreign land and of the prospect of returning home with some savings after a period of employment abroad. The small-scale peasants and the landless agricultural labourers, from among whom the estate labourers were recruited, were engaged mainly in the cultivation of food-grains, especially paddy, cholam, cumbu, and ragi. Their economic situation depended primarily on the fortunes of these crops. The small-scale peasant, with little or no monetary resources of his own, cultivated his land with capital borrowed against his prospective crop.[26] In case of the agricultural labourers their employment opportunities depended largely on the prospects of the harvests. But the prospects of peasant agriculture in South India depended mainly on the precarious and uncertain conditions of the monsoon rains, to the extent that it has been aptly pointed out that "the cultivation in India was a gamble in the monsoons."[27] The consequences of the failure of rains were distressing. As the Commissioner of Revenue Settlement, Land Records and Agriculture in the Madras Presidency pointed out

> ... an extensive failure of crops of even a single year is sufficient in this Presidency to deprive the majority of the land-holders (who are mostly petty proprietors) and the labouring classes (who are mostly field-labourers) of their ordinary means of livelihood.28

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26. Resettlement Report of Salem District for 1905, MBRP, Vol. 7176, Pro. No. 212 of 15 July 1905, p. 29.

27. M. Arokiaswami and T. M. Royappa, 1959, p. 83.

28. Order of the Revenue Department, Madras, on the Report on Agricultural Distress in the Madras Presidency in 1891-1892, MRP, Vol. 4633, Pro. No. 302 of 4 May 1894, p. 97.

The failure of a single monsoon was bad enough. But protracted drought and the consecutive failure of monsoons was a common occurrence in South India during our period. Agricultural crop failures inevitably brought about scarcities and at times culminated in widespread famine. As the Resettlement Officer of the Chingleput District wrote, "The chief feature of the rainfall in both monsoons is its extreme uncertainty. North-east monsoon is especially liable to fail completely. If this happens in two years in succession, famine, or in these days, extreme scarcity, is certain to follow."[29] In times of crop failure, the small-scale ryots found themselves getting deeper into indebtedness. The effect of agricultural distress on the different categories of agricultural labourers show some degree of variation. Where the small-scale ryots were engaged in part-time agricultural labour work, they lost this source of income and at least some members of their families found themselves redundant. The permanent farm labourers who were attached to richer ryots in some sort of servile bondage were looked after by their masters during good as well as bad agricultural seasons. The worst hit were those casual agricultural labourers who were also landless. In times of agricultural distress, this class lost virtually their only means of livelihood. With little or no resources to resist such calamities, they were threatened with virtual starvation. It was precisely this class, unlike the class of permanent farm labourers, that was numerically on the ascent during the nineteenth century. Of the casual agricultural labourers, the Collector of Nellore wrote in 1900 that

> Formerly, the ryot with his cultivating labourers was the agricutural unit. The labourers were attached to the soil and looked to their masters for support in good and bad seasons.... bond or self-interest kept the ryot and his labourers together.... The ryot has now no anxiety about securing labourers, and therefore no necessity to maintain them in hard times, and has less inducements to do so,... He employs large numbers at the time of sowings and harvest and then dispenses with their services. On the failure, therefore, of a single monsoon, all these labourers who, in former times, would naturally

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29. Resettlement Report of Chingleput District for 1907, MBRP, Vo. 8014, Pro. No. 349 of 11 September 1908, p. 27.

> look to and be maintained by their masters, are now thrown adrift without any means,... These people have no resisting power.... These are in the lowest social scale.... The main effect of distress on economic conditions seems to be the deterioration of the daily labourer,....30

Apart from depriving a considerable section of the agricultural population of their means of livelihood, the crop failures also increased the local food prices.[31] When the agricultural labourers were in such an economic and psychological condition of distress the offer of cash advances by the labour recruiters appeared a tempting source of relief for them. Thus, particularly in times of crop failures, labour migration inevitably increased, subsiding in times of favourable agricultural seasons. While labour emigration in any event took place even during favourable agricultural seasons due to the abject poverty of the agricultural labourers and the prospects of obtaining cash advances, recruitment became relatively easy and the supply of labour abundant, particularly in times of agricultural distress. Thus the cycles of harvests, crop conditions, and food-grain prices in South India were major factors causing sharp fluctuations in migration. In fact, in times of acute distress and famines, labour migration to the Island took place independent of the recruiting efforts of the planters.[32]

In the period from 1880 to 1910, it is possible to discern four major cycles of labour migration corresponding to the periods of economic fluctuations which the planting industry of the Island passed, viz., the depression from 1880 to 1886, the years of prosperity from 1887 to 1896, the years of slump in the tea industry from 1897 to 1904, and the period of revived prosperity after 1904.

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30. Report of the Collector of Nellore, MBRP, Vol. 6019, Pro. No. 489 of 25 October 1900, p. 15.

31. Apart from the local output of food-grains the demand for grains from beyond the Presidency, especially where famines had taken place, also affected local prices.

32. Col. Sec. of Ceylon to Sec. to the Government of India, No. 16 of 8 May 1880, MPP, Vol. 1555, Pro. No. 35 of 14 June 1880.

The quinquennium preceding 1880 was one of heavy migration due to the expansion of the coffee acreage and the output in the Island and more particularly because of agricultural distress in South India which culminated in the major famine of 1876-7. In the period from 1880 to 1886, however, there was a steep downswing in Indian labour immigration to the Island mainly due to the sharp decline in the demand for labour on the estates following the unprecedented economic depression in the planting sector during this period. These years saw the final eclipse of the mono-culture of coffee which was the mainstay of the economy of the Island. While the main cause of the depression was the rapid spread of the coffee leaf disease, the situation was aggravated by financial difficulties of the planters and the decline in the price of coffee in the world market. The output of the coffee estates and the earnings of the planters declined. The planters found it unprofitable to maintain the coffee estates. Some estates were abandoned while others lay in a semi-abandoned state.[33] A large number of estates changed hand at comparatively low prices. Some planters left the Island withdrawing the capital invested in Ceylon.[34] The planters who remained in the Island, realising the danger of the exclusive dependence on a single staple, took steps to diversify their planting enterprise in an attempt to get over the depression. During 1880-2 some progress was made in the cultivation of cinchona. Experiments in the cultivation of tea and cocoa were also carried out. However, till 1885 these attempts could not offset the loss incurred due to the decline in the coffee industry. Consequently, in spite of the attempts to diversify the economy, the decline of the coffee industry dominated the years of the depression.

The depression had its inevitably adverse effect on the labour situation in the Island. Because of the scarcity of capital, the

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33. D. M. Forrest, 1967, p. 99
J. Ferguson, 1892, p. 29.

34. Ibid., pp. 17, 27.
E. Gunewardane, 1965, p. 24.

unremunerative coffee crops, and the financial commitments in the struggle against the leaf disease, the planters effected economy to the extreme possible extent. Retrenchment became the order of the day.[35] A large number of Indian labourers who had come over during the 1870s were thrown out of employment. Some were absorbed in the planting of new crops. But this absorption could not keep pace with the exit of labourers from the abandoned and the low-yielding coffee estates. Since most of the tea and cinchona were planted interspersed in the existing coffee estates, there was no need for extensive clearing of virgin forest land during these years. By 1882, the demand for labour for the cultivation of cinchona declined, following the decline of that product. Tea, planted during the period 1880–5, did not create an immediate demand for a considerable force of regular labour for gathering and manufacturing of tea. The estates planted during these years were still not in yield as the tea plant required approximately 4-5 years to flush for harvesting. The demand during these years was mainly for casual labour for initial planting and a small labour force for the maintenance of the unbearing tea estates. Plantations apart, the only other avenue of employment for the unemployed labourers was the Public Works Department of the Ceylon Government. The Government, from time to time, engaged a few hundreds of casual labourers from among the Indian immigrants for road and railway construction works. But it had never been a large-scale employer of Indian immigrant labour. In normal times, however, some of the dislodged labourers could have obtained employment in Government works. But in the early 1880s, the depression badly affected the revenue of the Government. Consequently, Governor Longden launched a policy of retrenchment in public works which closed this limited opening for employment.

The result of the depression was to create a glut in the labour market. Those who got work on the estates had to offer their labour on

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35. Annual general meeting, 17 February 1880, PPAC 1881, p. 13. The Tropical Agriculturist, 1881-2, pp. 190, 456.

terms dictated by the employers. Wages were reduced.[36] Planters could not afford to pay even these low wages. Though the planters continued to provide their depleted labour force with rice and cloth, which constituted the basic necessities of the labourers, there is clear evidence that some planters failed to pay the labourers their balance of wages.[37] These balances constituted the savings of the labourers. The prospect of taking these savings to their villages was the major attraction of emigration. The years of the depression saw a heavy accumulation of arrears of the balance of wages.[38] Besides, the change in the ownership of coffee estates, which took place on an unusually large scale during these years of the depression, spelled disaster for the labourers. There is evidence that the new owners did not honour the arrears of wages left behind by the previous management. The immigrants found work on the plantations in Ceylon unremunerative and insecure. Large numbers who had come to Ceylon during the 1870[s] walked back to their villages in South India.

The agricultural situation in South India gave an additional impetus to this trend. During the period 1880-6 the Madras Presidency experienced a series of favourable seasons which helped the area to recover from the distressing conditions left behind by the major famine of 1876-7. From 1880 to 1886, except during 1884, on the whole there were fairly satisfactory rains during the months of south-west as well as north-east monsoons.[39] There was an increase in the local output of food-grains. The prices of these commodities rated low when compared with the preceding years. Thus, the early 1880[s] presented conditions which enabled the South Indians to earn a livelihood in their villages without any large-scale emigration. The urge to emigrate was, consequently, less pronounced in these years.

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36. See below, pp. 171-173.

37. 'Our Labour Supply and the Tundu System', by Agricola, COO, 22 May 1895.

38. See below, pp. 227-228.

39. LRSRMP for 1881-2, MRP, Vol. 2135, Pro. No. 799 of 2 July 1883.
LRSRMP for 1882-3, ibid., Vol. 2368, Pro. NO. 890 of 28 July 1884.
LRSRMP for 1883-4, ibid., Vol. 2835, Pro. No. 575 of 25 June 1886.

The contraction of employment opportunities on the estates in Ceylon appears to have coincided with a period of comparatively favourable agricultural and food situation in South India. While the arrivals in Ceylon declined sharply, for the first time in the history of Indian Immigration to the Island the departures of Indian labourers from Ceylon exceeded the number of arrivals.

In contrast, the decade after 1887 saw a heavy demand for plantation labour in the Island due to the rapid expansion of the tea industry during these years. Between 1883 and 1897, there was a five-fold increase in the acreage under tea. The tea acreage which stood at 32,000 in 1882 increased to 350,000 by 1897.[40] Thus, nearly one half of the Island's total tea acreage of 636,230 (according to the estimates of 1971) were planted during these years.[41] With the onset of the tea boom, capital and enterprise were not slow in forthcoming. The capital invested in the uneconomic coffee, cocoa, and cinchona plantations was steadily transferred to the cultivation of tea. A considerable number of planters who had left the Island during the coffee depression returned to the Island.[42] A large number of new planters also invested capital.

The expansion involved the conversion of a large number of abandoned coffee estates to the cultivation of tea and also the opening up of virgin forest land in both low and up-country areas.[43] The clearing of land and the subsequent lining, holeing, and planting of tea created a demand for casual male labour. After the initial planting, the demand for labour continued for the maintenance of the yet unbearing tea estates.

This was also a period of heavy flushing of tea bushes. Estates planted before 1885 began to flush out. Those planted after 1885 began to

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40. See Appendix D.

41. Statistical Pocket Book of Ceylon, Ceylon. Department of Census and Statistics, 1971, p. 59.

42. J. Ferguson, 1891-92, p. 27.
J. Ferguson, 1893, p. 116.

43. Ibid., pp. 27, 36, 38.

flush out after 4 or 5 years. In parts of the low lying areas in the Western, Southern, and Sabaragamuwa Provinces, where virgin lands were cultivated with tea, the tea bushes flushed out faster than on the hills.[44] Further, as a means to compensate against the fall in tea prices which gradually took place in the 1890s, the planters were over-anxious to increase their production and hence took to coarse plucking of even immature bushes. The overall result of the state of the tea industry during this period was a progressive increase in the demand for labour with the annual increase in the tea acreage reaching the bearing stage.

Besides, the tea estates required a new type of labour quite unlike the coffee estates. In contrast to the production of coffee, the tea leaves were transformed into a final consumer article on the estates. The leaves were withered, rolled, and finally prepared and packed in the factories on the estates.[45] All large estates had factories for the manufacture of tea. The small-scale growers of tea sold their leaves to the factories of the large estates in the neighbourhood. Thus a new demand for factory workers arose.

While the demand for labour in the Island was on the increase after 1886, the "push" factors at work in South India induced the out flow. The spell of satisfactory agricultural seasons which had begun in 1880 in South India came to a halt in 1886. Though the year 1887 saw a fairly well distributed rainfall in most of the South Indian districts, in Madura and Tinnevelly, which were among the main sources of labour supply to the Island, the failure of rains caused critical economic conditions for

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44. In the estates lying in low elevation, the tea bushes matured within 2-3 years of initial planting. But "low grown tea" is of low quality.

45. J. Ferguson, 1887, pp. 347ff.
In case of coffee, the production process of cleaning, preparing, softing, and packing for shipping etc. were done in Colombo. Therefore, there was no demand for factory workers on the coffee estates.

the poorer classes.[46] Though Tanjore and Trichinopoly fared better, the out-turn of crops fell very much below the average.[47] Besides, the year also witnessed a heavy outbreak of cholera and smallpox. The economic situation did not improve until 1893. Throughout these years the Madras Presidency experienced agricultural distress.[48] The rainfall remained below average, the food-grain crops were short, and the food prices ruled high. To escape from the consequent economic peril, some section of the poorer classes in South India became more inclined to emigrate.[49] In 1887, the year which saw the first of the protracted unfavourable agricultural seasons in South India since 1880, the number of immigrant estate labourers who arrived in the Island was double the number of the previous year. Thereafter, the annual stream of labour immigration assumed an upward trend. The year 1889, however, saw a drop in migration despite the rising food prices in South India. The tea acreage in production not being heavy as yet, the planters apparently relaxed their recruiting efforts in 1889 after the increase in immigration in the two preceding years. A large tea acreage came into production in 1890. The consequent increase in the demand for labour together with the persistence of bad agricultural seasons in South India brought about an increase in labour immigration in that year. This upward swing reached its peak in the famine years of 1891-2.[50] In the years 1893-4, the flow began to ebb despite the progress of the tea

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46. AR of the Board of Revenue for 1886-7, MBRP, Vol. 3080, Pro. No. 347
LRSRMP for 1886-7, ibid., Vol. 3306, Pro. No. 753 of 1 November 1888.
MMPRI for 1887-8, p. 10.

47. Ibid.

48. LRSRMP for 1888-9, MRP, Vol. 3764, Pro. No. 613 of 5 August 1890, p. 95.
LRSRMP for 1889-90, ibid., Vol. 3989, Pro. No. 827 of 4 September 1891, p. 117.
LRSRMP for 1890-1, ibid., Vol. 4219, Pro. No. 1075 of 20 October 1892.
'Agricultural Distress in the Madras Presidency in 1891-2', ibid., Vol. 4633, Pro. No. 302 of 3 May 1894, pp. 93-100.

49. Collector of Madura to Sec. to the Commissioner of Revenue Settlement, Madras, No. 47 of 5 July 1888, MRP, Vol. 3319, Pro. No. 345 of 24 July 1888.

50. 'Agricultural Distress in the Madras Presidency in 1891-2', MRP, Vol. 4633, Pro. No. 302 of 3 May 1894, pp. 93-100.

industry. The decrease was mainly due to the relatively favourable agricultural seasons which occurred in South India in these years.[51] It is also likely that the increase in immigration in the years 1887-92 would have influenced the planters to slacken their recruiting efforts. When immigration took a downward trend after 1893 the planters intensified their recruiting activities, leading to an increase in immigration in the years after 1894 in spite of the persistence of favourable seasons in South India in these years.[52] This upward swing reached its peak in 1897--a year of deficient rains, failure of crops, and high food prices in South India.[53]

From 1897 to 1904, the tea industry in the Island passed through a slump. The progressive downward swing in the U.K. tea prices, which had for several years narrowed the profit margin of the Ceylon tea planters, continued to descend to an unremunerative level after 1897. The extensive cultivation and the consequent over-production of tea in India and Ceylon during the preceding decade made such an eventuality almost unavoidable. The slump discouraged further extension of tea cultivation in Ceylon. The desire to combat over-production led to finer plucking of tea bushes. The total tea acreage which stood in 1897 at 404,574 remained at a virtually stagnant level. Unremunerative prices compelled the planters to curtail maintenance work to the minimum. All this resulted in a decline in the demand for labour.

However, the downward swing in the demand for labour did not descend to the level which prevailed during the years 1880-5. The slump

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51. AR of the Collector of Trichinopoly for 1892-3, MBRP, Vol. 4644, Pro. No. 275
LRSRMP for 1893-4, MRP, Vol. 4839, Pro. No. 643 of 23 September pp. 359-360.
LRSRMP for 1894-5, ibid., Vol. 5293, Pro. No. 612 of 23 July 1897.

52. AR of the Collector of Trichinopoly for 1895-6, ibid., Vol. 5070, Pro. No. 146 of 26 June 1896, p.2.
AR of the Collector of Tanjore for 1895-6, ibid., Pro. No. 162 of 11 July 1896, pp. 1-2.

53. LRSRMP for 1897-8, ibid., Vol. 5745, Pro. No. 409 of 28 June 1899.

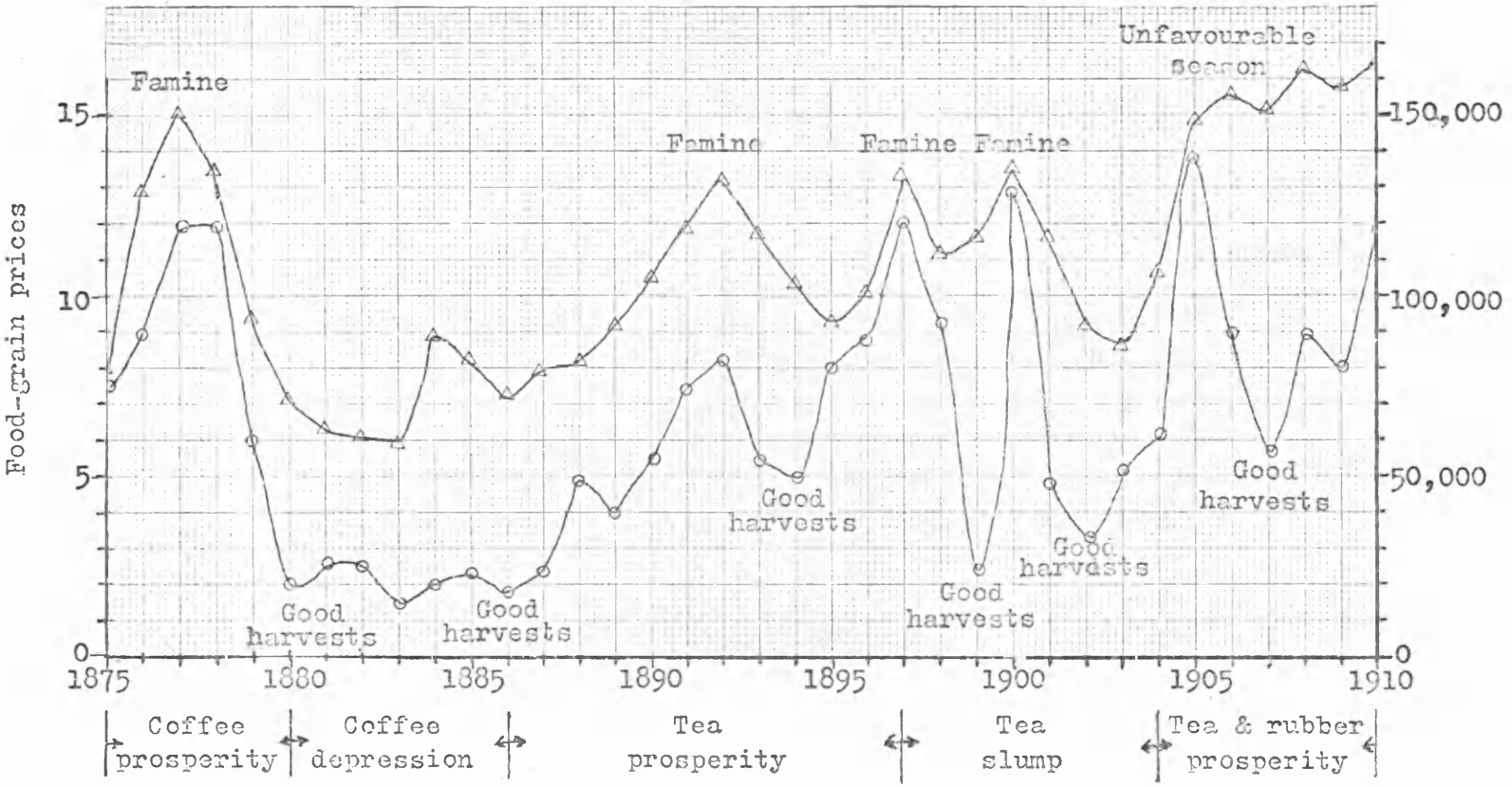

Figure 3.1 Annual trends in plantation labour immigration into Ceylon and food-grain prices in South Indian districts of Trichinopoly, Tanjore, Madura, and Tinnevalley

Figure 3.2 Long term cyclical changes in adult plantation labour immigration, 1880-1910. (Showing the annual average arrivals for each of the periods of ⓐ the coffee prosperity ⓑ the coffee depression ⓒ the tea prosperity ⓓ the tea slump and ⓔ the tea and rubber prosperity

was nothing like the depression of the 1880s in its magnitude. The initial overhead capital investment for the tea industry was relatively high. Therefore, the unremunerative tea prices were not immediately followed by a discontinuance of production on the existing estates. Instead the planters kept their estates going, looking ahead for better days rather than incur capital losses. Though further extension of cultivation was stopped, yet there was a demand for labour for the maintenance and production processes on the large acreage of tea brought under cultivation during the preceding period.

On the whole, the period of the slump saw a sustained decline in immigration to Ceylon. But the downward swing did not proceed without sharp fluctuation. The year 1899 saw a steep drop in the number of arrivals. Apart from the decline in the demand for labour after 1897 and the heavy immigration during the four preceding years which created a situation of surplus labour in the Island, the decline in 1899 was the outcome also of the economic situation in South India. The years 1898 and 1899 witnessed very favourable agricultural seasons in the Madras Presidency due to abundant and well distributed rainfall.[54] There was a clear drop in food prices. But the year 1900 was one of famine. There were extensive crop failures and high food prices throughout the Presidency.[55] To escape from this distressing condition, a large number of immigrant labourers swamped the Island in 1900 in spite of the lack of a heavy "pull" on the demand side of labour. Most of the spill-over from the estates were absorbed in the construction of the Kelani Valley and Udapussellawa railways which were started in 1900. With the return of favourable agricultural seasons in South India in the years 1902-3 emigration subsided, for the tea industry which was still in a state of slump failed to attract

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54. LRSRMP for 1898-9, MRP, Vol. 6005, Pro. No. 462 of 14 May 1900. MMPRI for 1898-9, p. 106.

55. LRSRMP for 1899-1900, MBRP, Vol. 6222, Pro. No. 160 of 2 August 1901. LRSRMP for 1900-1, MRP, Vol. 6444, Pro. No. 485 of 3 June 1902. Report of the Indian Famine Commission, 1901, p. 4.

additional labour.[56]

The recession in the tea industry came to an end in 1904. The quinquennium after 1905 was one of prosperity in the plantation sector in the Island. The tea industry which re-emerged from the slump took on a more stable character than before. Improvement in the quality of tea, stable and remunerative prices, an increase in world demand, and the tea planters' experience during the slump--all helped to revive the industry. Though the total tea acreage did not undergo a substatial increase, the industry became remunerative and production increased. The period from 1904-10 also witnessed the rapid growth of a new commercial crop, rubber, largely due to the increase in world demand consequent on the progress of the motor car industry. The increase in rubber prices set-off an international rubber mania. Heavy investment in rubber planting in the Island increased the total acreage from 25,000 in 1904 to 203,000 by 1910.[57] These developments inevitably led to an increase in the demand for labour after 1904.

The planters were fortunate in that the series of favourable agricultural seasons which occurred in South India between 1902 and 1904 soon came to an end. 1905 was a year of near famine and recruiting of labourers became relatively easy.[58] The number of labourers who arrived in the Island for estate work in 1905 exceeded even the heavy 1900 mark. Though the annual immigration in the period from 1906 to 1910 fell below that of the year 1905, yet the total arrivals during the quinquennium exceeded that of any preceding quinquennium in our period. This heavy increase in immigration reveals the impact of the heavy demand for labour in the Island as well as that of agricultural distress in South India in

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56. LRSRMP for 1903-4, MBRP, Vol. 7163, Pro. No. 269 of 21 March 1905. MMPRI for 1902-3, p. 103. Ibid., for 1903-4, pp. 105, 168.

57. See Appendix D.

58. AnR of CLC for the eleven months ending 30 November 1905, YPAC, p. 12.

these years.[59] Though the near famine condition of 1905 terminated by the end of that year, the subsequent years, except 1907, did not witness any conspicious improvement in the agricultural conditions in the Presidency. The rainfall, during both the south-west and the north-east monsoons were deficient, resulting in short outturn of crops and heavy food prices. 1907 was the only exceptional year when good harvests and a decline in the prices of food-grains in South India brought about a drop in the number of immigrants arriving in the Island.

The impact of the two above stated broad economic factors operating in South India and Ceylon on the trends of labour migration is also seen in the seasonal fluctuations of immigration. The detailed monthly statistics on immigration available for our period do not distinguish between the different types of immigrants except for the years 1900-1.[60] The monthly trend of labour immigration for the years 1900-1 appeared to have run parallel to the gross monthly statistics on all types of immigrants from South India. The bulk of the latter were plantation labourers. The trends shown in Figure 3·3 reveal that labour immigration took an upward spurt in the first half of the year rapidly increasing in the months of March to June. Thereafter, immigration took a downward trend.

On the side of labour supply, the months from January to June formed the slack season in agriculture in South India. January to March was the driest quarter of the year. April to May witnessed some rainfall but it was insufficient for extensive cultivation purposes. The main form of cultivation which took place during the first half of the year was "dry" cultivation. The second half of the year was the main monsoon season in South India; the south-west monsoon usually occurring from June to September and the north-east monsoon from October to December.

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59. AnR of CLC for 1907, ibid 1907, p. 1.
AnR of CLC for 1908, ibid 1908, pp. 15-16
AnR of CLC for 1909, ibid 1909, p. 17.

60. Weekly Returns of Immigration and Emigration at the Port of Colombo, by the Acting Master Attendent. Published weekly), CGG.

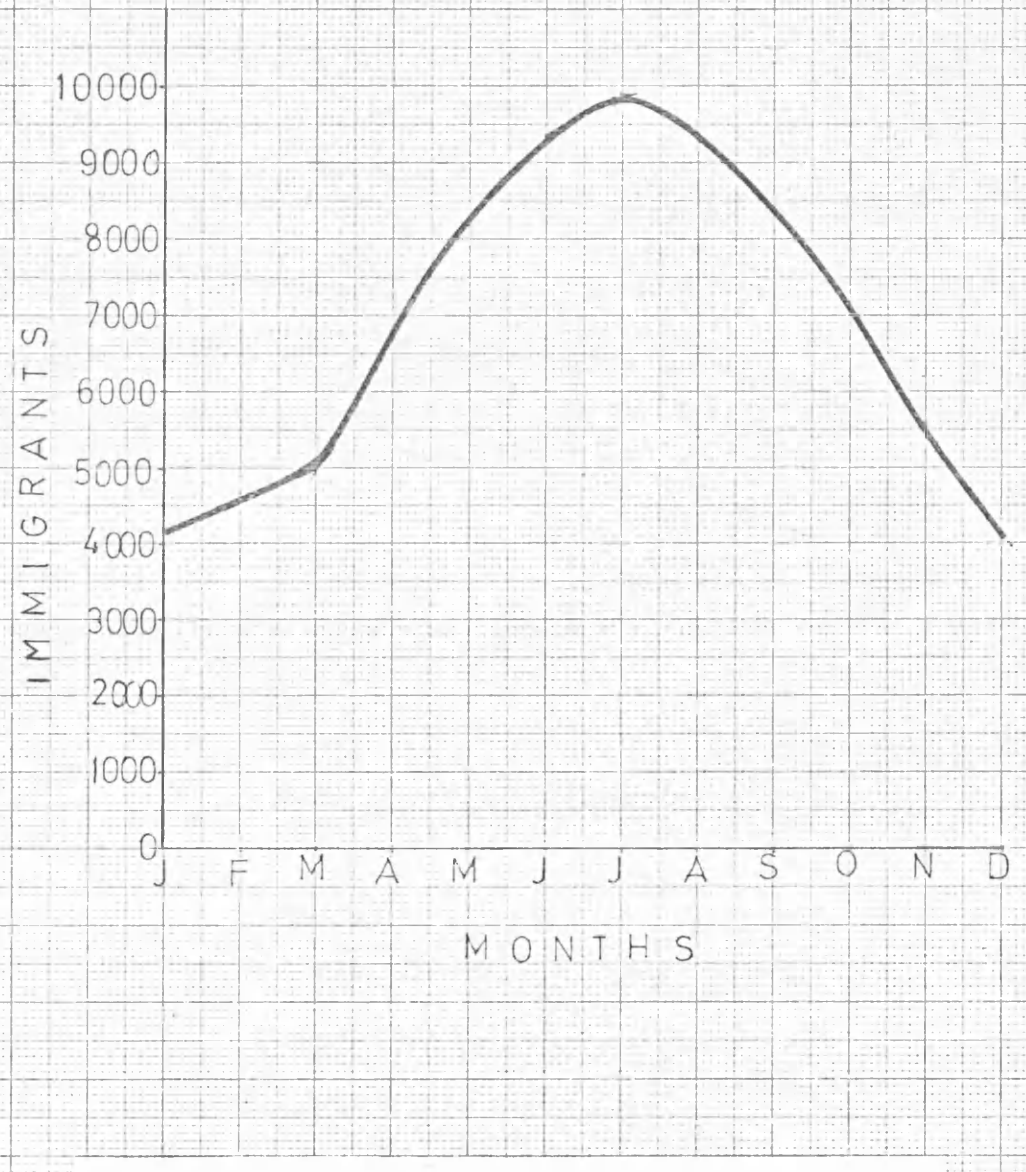

Figure 3.3 The average monthly South Indian immigration into Ceylon, 1880-1910

The south-west monsoon was usually deficient and the main source of rains in South India was the north-east monsoon. It was during the months of the north-east monsoon that "wet" cultivation of food-grains took place. The quarterly rainfall statistics for Trichinopoly, Tanjore, Madura, and Tinnevelly reveal the above stated trend in the rainfall rhythm in these districts.[61] The bulk of the cultivation in these districts were done during the months following June.

On the tea plantations in the Island, April to June were the months of heavy yield when the demand for labour was at its peak. During July to September, the work-load on the estates was at its minimum and it compelled the planters even to cut down the weekly quota of work given to the labour force.[62] The rest of the months witnessed an average level of production on the tea estates. The conclusion then is that the season of peak work-load on the estates coincided with the slack season in South Indian agriculture.

It is difficult to assess the differential impact of the two above stated variables on the migratory flow. On the whole, while the long term cyclical fluctuations corresponding to the periods 1880-5, 1886-97, 1898-1904, and 1905-10 appear to have been predominantly influenced by the major fluctuations in the demand for labour, within each major cycle, the short term annual waves of migration seem to have been affected more by the seasonal fortunes of the agricultural situation in South India.

The entire process reveals the responsiveness of the migrants to the economic opportunities available to them. When the problem of labour

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61. For eg. during the period 1898-1902 the average quarterly rainfall in Trichinopoly, Tanjore, Tinnevelly, and Madura districts were as follows.

January-March	3.4
April-May	5.8
June-September	8.9
October-December	19.8

See also, AR of the Collector of Trichinopoly for 1888-9, MBRP, Vol. 3541, Pro. No. 327 of 3 July 1889.

62. See below, pp. 180-183.

redundancy affected the plantation sector as in the years 1880-5, the Island was spared the burden of the upkeep of the dislodged labour families, for they returned to their villages in South India. Similarly, when agricultural distress struck South India to the point of famines, the Island served as an outlet for some of the distress-stricken populace of South India. For the labourer, it was fortunate that more often the years of slump in the plantation sector (1880-5 and 1898-1904) coincided with fairly good agricultural seasons in South India (1880-4, 1899, and 1902-4). For the planter, the years of the most rapid expansion of the tea industry (1886-97) and the rapid expansion of rubber planting (1904-10) more often coincided with the years of agricultural distress in South India (1887-92, 1896-7, 1905-6, and 1908). Thus, the expansion of tea and rubber planting seems to have taken place under favourable conditions in that the years of expansion of the industry coincided more often with the years when the impact of the major economic factor in South India inhibiting the flow of labour, viz., good agricultural seasons, was less intense and less frequent.

3. The adequacy of the plantation labour supply

In the following analysis we will try to find out how far the supply of immigrant labour met the demand on the plantations in our period. Evidence lead us to the conclusion that the planters did not face a permanent scarcity of immigrant labour and that the shortage of labour, when it did occur, was confined to the months of heavy tea yield. Nor did this seasonal labour shortage become an annual feature. Barring 1890, it was felt mainly in the years of good harvests in peasant agriculture in those South Indian districts which supplied labour to the estates and also during the years when there was heavy labour emigration to Malaya--the major competitor of Ceylon for South Indian emigrant labour. When these two factors occurred simultaneously, the Ceylon planters got into serious difficulties in procuring an adequate supply of labour, suggesting that

the Ceylon plantation labour system suffered in comparision with the alternative opportunities for employment when the latter were available to the poorer classes in South India on a satisfactory scale.

The information at our disposal is inadequate for a systematic statistical analysis of the demand and supply of immigrant plantation labour in the Island. We have based our analysis of the adequacy of the labour supply on two types of sources. First, we have made use of the trends in the rates of cash advances paid to the kanganies by the planters to procure labour. Secondly, we have utilized the available qualitative evidence in the form of the planters' comments on the adequacy of the labour supply. In applying the scale rates of advances as a major indicator to the analysis of the adequacy of the labour supply, we need at the outset explain our decision to do so.

Of the various inducements held out by the planters to procure labour, the most effective initial offer was the cash advance. The daily wage rates of the labourers remained virtually static over the entire period of our study and the point of competition between the supply and demand of labour appears to have centred on the rates of advances.[63] Therefore, as between the wage rates and the rates of advances, it was the latter which responded to the supply-demand situation of labour. It is important to see how the system of advances came to play this vital role.

The term "coast advances" at first, in its strict sense, meant the cash advances paid to the kanganies to obtain labourers direct from South India.[64] However, subsequently, in actual practice the term assumed a wider connotation covering all types of money advanced by the planters to the kanganies such as advances to maintain the gangs of labourers on the estates or to obtain "local" labour gangs in the Island by way of "crimping" from other estates or to obtain from those estates which had

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63. See below, chap. IV.

64. In the planters' jargon, South India was often referred to as the "Coast".

excess labour. Thus, both strictly "local" and "coast" advances came to be commonly referred to as "coast advances" by the planters. These advances, as we have seen earlier on, were given to the kanganies on Promissory Notes. The kangany had the right to shift his labour gang from the estate at one months' notice to the employer provided he repaid the total remaining debt of the gang to the estate. The shifting of gangs between estates was facilitated by what was known as the "tundu system" whereby a kangany could obtain from his employer a note, generally referred to as a tundu, stating his total debt to the estate, offer his gang to any estate in need of labour for the amount stated in the tundu or for better terms to the kangany depending on the state of the labour market at the time, settle his former tundu debt with the fresh cash advance obtained from the new employer and move his gang to serve the latter.[65] The system therefore allowed the labour gangs some freedom of mobility. The "tundu system" was originally evolved by the planters as a method convenient for themselves to transfer labour gangs from the estates with excess labour to others in short supply on the payment by the latter of the gang's debt to the former. Thus the system as originally envisaged helped to transfer surplus labour gangs without a loss to the estate on its coast advances account.[66] The system was, therefore, a source of security to the planters for all out-going advances. However, during seasons of labour shortage the kangany began to use the "tundu system" to his advantage by demanding the tundu from the employer and transferring the gang to an estate willing to pay an advance in excess of the gang's debt to the former employer, that is for a "transfer price" well above the "tundu price".[67]

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65. For a specimen tundu, see Appendix B.

66. 'The Labour Question Memorandum', by the Chairman of PAC, PPAC 1896, Editorial, COO, 7 June 1890.

67. Planting Notes from Dolosbage, COW, 3 February 1902.

When supplying labourers to the estates either direct from South India or by way of transferring "local gangs" the kangany sought to obtain the highest possible advance from the planter.[68] Out of the advances, the kangany met the initial cost of recruitment and transportation of labour in case of new gangs from South India or met the local financial encumbrances in case of "old gangs" already in the Island. The amount of money remaining, if any, after meeting these expenses was retained by the kangany. This was an important source of his income. Available evidence conclusively proves that while, on the one hand, the kangany tried to obtain the highest possible advance from the planter, on the other hand, he tried to spend as little as possible of it on the labourers in order to enhance his own margin of profit in the transaction. The kangany's personal income being thus directly tied up with the rates of advances, it was inevitable that he should bargain for heavy advances rather than for an increase in the daily wage rates, which though benificial to his labourers would bring no immediate personal income to him. Thus, the key position occupied by the kangany in the supply of labour partly explains why competition for labour centred on the rates of advances rather than the wage rates.[69]

The planters, on the whole, were keen to maintain both the daily wage rates and the rates of advances at a minimum. However, where competition for labour became inevitable, the planters preferred to offer higher rates of advances to procure labour rather than increase the wage rates.[70] The planters were of the view that wage rates, once increased, would be difficult to reduce if and when periods of depression in the

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68. A. Thomsom to Sec. of Ceylon Association in London, 9 July 1897, PPAC 1898, Correspondence, pp. ccx-ccxi.

69. An advertisement in the COO by a Ceylon planter read, "50 coolies with a good kangany—very good advances given". The advertisement met with strong criticism on the ground that such advertisements only tended to create more competition among the planters for labour already in the Island without in any way helping to increase the flow of fresh labour from South India. COO, 1 November 1890.

70. Cey. Lab. Com. 1908, Proceedings.

planting sector were to occur. Their fear of a slump was particularly acute because the trend in the price of tea since the early 1890[s] was one of decline. Besides, advances unlike wages were not outright payments. The advances were regarded as recoverable assets. These were deducted periodically from the wages of the labourers. The failure to repay advances taken from the estate placed the kangany at the mercy of the planter because the law provided for imprisonment in case of non-payment of debt. Because the advances tied the kangany to the estate by debt, the system enabled the planters to maintain a hold over the kangany and his labour gang.

However, the planters were not ready to let the rates of advances increase indiscriminately. In spite of the advantages which the system of competition of advances gave the planters over the system of competition of wage rates in the procurement of labour, the former was an evil one for him all the same. Handing out lump sums as advances in the hope of obtaining labour had the attendant risk of loss. In fact, some kanganies disappeared with such advances. Though legal provision was available to the planter to obtain warrants for the arrest of defaulting kanganies, it was difficult and expensive to get a runaway kangany arrested, particularly if he had bolted to South India. However, the evidence of the planters reveal that the cases of runaway kanganies were rare because bolting meant loss of his means of regular income. The system worked partly out of necessity and partly out of a certain degree of mutual trust. The worst evil to the planters was that, at times, advances given to the kanganies got accumulated beyond any hope of recovery. Evidence reveals that while the planters did periodically recover a part of the outstanding advances, they had at times to write off heavily accumulated advances as irrecoverable debt. Besides, heavy advances meant a heavy outlay of working capital on labour.[71] Furthermore, the increasing offer of advances

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71. Editorial, COW, 13 December 1902.

encouraged the kanganies to constantly shift gangs between estates thereby creating a state of instability in the labour force in the Island. Competition of local advances also tended to discourage the kanganies from recruiting labour in South India. With a view to avoid these eventualities, the planters at times attempted to fix a ceiling to the rates of advances payable to the kanganies and thereby tried to avoid the competition of advances. There were times when the planters mooted schemes to combine themselves and act in unison to keep the rates of advances low.[72] The failure of these attempts to check the rise of rates of advances reveal the intensity of the competition for labour among the planters in times of boom.

The amount of advances a planter was prepared to accede to a kangany depended on the extent of the demand for labour on his estate. An estate faced with an acute shortage of labour was prepared to pay a relatively higher cash advance to engage a gang of labourers than an estate with a marginal demand for labour.[73] A state of surplus labour kept the rates of advances relatively low while scarcity of labour encouraged the kanganies to press for higher advances.[74] The daily wage rates hardly entered into negotiations between the planters and the kanganies at the time of recruitment of labour to the estates. The point of all negotiations and bargaining between the planter--the purchaser of labour, and the kangany--the supplier of labour, was the rate of advances. The amount of advances which the planters were prepared to pay and which the kanganies were prepared to accept at a given time in a given district reveal the state of the labour market in that district.

A certain degree of circumspection, however, is necessary in applying the movement of the rates of cash advances as a barometer to test the demand-supply situation of the labour market. Data on rates of

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72. See below, pp. 155-160.

73. A general meeting of C of C, 15 January 1885, WCO, 16 January 1885.

74. Cey. Lab. Com. 1908, Report, pp. xi.xii.

advances are scattered and incomplete. Most of the available information are on the amount of debt of the labourers to the estate, that is, the estate advances account of the labourers. The temptation, therefore, is to take the debt account of the labourers as roughly synonymous with the rates of advances and utilize the amount of the labourers' debt to analyse the state of the labour market.[75] The debt a labourer was able to obtain at a certain time was certainly an indication of his worth to the creditor and therefore shows his value in the labour market at the time the debt was obtained. But, on the other hand, due to two reasons the debt account is not always a satisfactory indication of the adequacy or otherwise of the supply of labour.

It will be shown in chapter V that the total amount an average labourer was able to work-off per year against his estate debt account was small. Therefore, the labourer's debt to the estate underwent only a small reduction in any one year. Thus even if the following year happened to be one of surplus labour, the "tundu price" of the labourer, that is his total debt to the estate, would remain high all the same as a long term repercussion of the previous year's labour shortage.

Secondly, it is also necessary to understand how far the rise in the rates of advances was a function of the rise in the cost of living of the labourers and the increase in the cost of transportation of labourers from India to the estates independent of the demand-supply situation in the labour market. In chapter V we shall develop the theme that the period after 1890 was one of rising cost of living and that one factor which reconciled the labourers to the rise in the cost of living in a context of static daily wage rates was their ability to obtain cash advances from time to time from the estates; that these advances helped them to bridge the gap between the rising cost of living and a lagging

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75. This approach has been adopted by L. R. Jayawardena in his analysis of the plantation labour market.
L. R. Jayawardena, unpublished dissertation for research fellowship, Cambridge, 1960, pp. 63-65.

daily wage rate though at an annually increasing rate of indebtedness. Therefore, even under conditions of an adequate supply of labour, the "tundu price" which usually indicated the total indebtedness of the gang to the estate could still be high. This is precisely what happened, for instance, in the year 1906.[76]

Therefore, the satisfactory test of adequacy is not the estate advances account but the rate a planter actually paid at a given time to obtain labour. At best the total indebtedness of the labourers reflect the cyclical state of the demand and supply of labour over a period of years and it is a poor test to analyse the annual trends in the seasonal adequacy of the labour supply.

Even after eliminating the debt accounts and taking strictly the rates of advances paid by the planters to test the adequacy of the labour supply there is still another problem. As indicated above, the rate of advances could be a mere reflection of the rise in the cost of living and the cost of importing labour. For example, as we will see later on in detail, during the early 1870s the planters paid an average rate of Rs.5-Rs.10 per labourer. In 1905, the average rate of coast advances approximated Rs.30. The increase in the rate does not necessarily mean that there was a relative shortage of labour in 1905. In fact, the labour supply was as abundant in 1905 as in 1878.[77] Our problem is to find out how we could assess whether a particular rate of coast advances reasonably reflected the supply-demand situation of labour independent of the impact of the rise in the cost of living and the rise in the cost of importing labour.

There is one way in which the above stated limitation could be minimized. The planters at different times during our period held out different scale rates of advances as the current moderate scale to procure

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76. See below, p. 161.
1906 was a year when the supply of labour was adequate but the "tundu price" of labour gangs was heavy.

77. See below, p. 161. See also, Figure 3.4 (p. 166)

labour. Thus, in the late 1870^{s} and 1880^{s} they viewed Rs.5-Rs.10 as the moderate rate; in the 1890^{s} and during 1904-10 the planters considered Rs.10-Rs.15 and Rs.30 as the moderate rates respectively.[78] At any of these above stated periods if the rates paid by the planters exceeded the rate considered by the planters as moderate it can be reasonably regarded as an indication of a scarcity of labour. Similarly, if the rate paid by the planters fell below the current moderate rate it can be regarded as a reflection of an adequate supply of labour. Therefore, in our analysis of the adequacy of the labour supply it would be more realistic for us to use the current moderate rate as the base rather than use one rate as the base for the entire period 1880-1910.

Due to the lack of consistent data on the annual and seasonal changes in the trends of the rates of advances we hope to supplement the available evidence on the rates of advances with another group of evidence, mainly qualitative, which reveals the planters' behaviour towards the question of the labour supply during each year. This category mainly consist of the annual reports of the Ceylon Planters' Association and the District Planters' Associations. Besides, there are other evidence such as discussions in the press, speeches of the leading planters, passing of resolutions, mooting of various schemes, and the appointment of labour commissions, each reflecting the general state of the labour market during the respective years. We will look into all this evidence in the following analysis.

There is hardly any detailed statistical information on the monthly or the seasonal movement of rates of advances paid to attract labour. However, evidence is overwhelming that it was during the months of high yield of tea that the kanganies demanded high advances and that

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78. 'Labour Supply'. Extract of a paper read out at a meeting of the Northern Districts Planters' Association, COO,8 May 1895. Also see below, pp. 148-161.

the planters were receptive to the demands of the kanganies.[79] The proceedings of the Ceylon Planters' Association and the District Planters' Associations reveal that the outcry of the planters against heavy advances was mainly confined to the season from April to May of the year.[80] Passing of resolutions and the mooting of various schemes with a view to keep the rates of advances at a low level always took place during these months. Thereafter such activities subsided only to recur again in the next season of high yield. A correspondent to The Ceylon Observer, Overland Edition succintly pointed out the situation when he wrote at the end of the spring of 1895 that, "We shall probably go to sleep over the labour question now until next spring when we shall wake up again."[81] During the rest of the year the planters found the available supply of labour adequate to cope with the average work-load on the estates. In fact, in a few months, particularly from July to September, the planters found it difficult to provide a full working-week for their labour force either due to bad climatic conditions or due to low yield of tea during these months.[82] This seasonal fluctuation in the work-load on the tea estates was the major problem which the tea planters had to face with their labour. The overall problem of the planters was aptly stated in the Annual Report of the Ceylon Planters' Association for the year 1896—a year of labour shortage. According to the Report

> During the heavy flushing spring months of the year there was perhaps an unusual outcry raised as to the shortness of the labour supply. Your Committee thinks that during these months there will always be some difficulty in coping with the flush, because if the supply of labour were sufficient to easily cope with the flush during these months, it would be more than can be economically employed during the remainder of the year.83

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79. Circular on 'Coast Advances and the Labour Supply', issued by PAC and C of C, PPAC 1891, Correspondence, p. xxix.

80. 'The Cooly Labour Supply and Crimping', by X, COO, 20 March 1890.

81. 'The Labour Question', by UNITAS SALUS NOSTRA, ibid., 24 May 1895. See also, 'Labour and Ceylon Products', by A Thirsty World, ibid., 28 May 1895. Sub-editorial, ibid., 23 May 1895.

82. See below, pp. 180-183.

83. Forty-second AnR of PAC, PPAC 1896, p. xxxiii.

The planters were normally inclined to maintain a labour force sufficient for the the average requirements of the estates and they sought to obtain casual labour to cope with the few peak months of activity on the estates. They preferred to lay-off such casual labour at the end of the season.[84] The problem of the Ceylon planters was, therefore, the need of a pool of extra labour from which they could draw during the months of heavy work.

How did the planters react to this seasonal shortage of labour?. The planting region of the Island consisted of approximately 2,000 estates of varying sizes in acreage and in their labour requirements. Some estates were managed by proprietor-planters. But this type of plantations, which was the dominant one in the coffee period, was on the decline in the tea period. The bulk of the tea acreage was organised in the form of limited liability companies. Private enterprise and competition was the theme. The superintendents and the planters had their organisations--the District Planters' Associations and the Ceylon Planters' Association--for themselves to act in concert in matters of their common interest. The great majority of the planters were in these organisations. But these voluntary organisations could not bind their members to the decisions of the organisations and the success of the decisions depended mainly on the degree of voluntary adherence and unanimity shown by the members. In those aspects of the plantation sector where competition among the planters was rife and voluntary adherence to common rules was difficult to achieve, individual planters and superintendents were inclined to go their own way to attain their immediate economic objectives. The question of the labour supply was one such aspect where competition among the employers was heavy. Whereas, from time to time, common rules of conduct with regard to the labour problems were framed by the planters, these rules were flouted by at least some members of the planting community when they were pressed for labour. The absentee proprietors

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84. Planting Notes from Kotmale, COO, 21 February 1891.

living in England and their Colombo Agents were the only ones who could have prevailed on their estate superintendents. But they, on the whole, left the task of procurement of labour in the hands of the superintendents so long as the company estates showed dividends and the latter had to find labour somehow to safeguard their billets.[85] The ultimate result was that when labour shortage did occur, the reaction of the planters varied depending on the economic situation of each planter. On the whole, the planters seem to have adopted four different means to meet the seasonal shortage of labour.

Some planters took steps to obtain fresh supplies of labour from South India during the peak months on the estates as seen in the upward spurt of labour immigration during the second quarter of every year. There were others who showed a reluctance and an indifference to recruit such extra hands from the "Coast". The inevitable tendency of the latter was to engage "local" labour gangs during the peak months by the offer of high cash advances.[86] Some planters even sought to crimp labour from other estates by inducing their kanganies to approach others employed in the neighbouring districts.[87] Recruitment from South India was uncertain and

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85. 'Labour via Tuticorin for Estates', by Crops, ibid., 9 August 1891. From time to time the Agents and the proprietors were urged to influence their estate superintendents with a view to keep a check on the competition of advances. In 1904, the PAC adopted a resolution in which the Agents and the proprietors were requested to prevail on their superintendents to prevent the latter exceeding Rs.30 per labourer as advances. But there was little response to the request. In fact there were frequent allegations that during times of labour shortage, the proprietors and Agents were inclined to privately inform their superintendents to procure labour irrespective of the rate of advances. The conduct of the Agents and the proprietors could be partly attributed to the fact that out-going advances were entered in the estate accounts as recoverable assets.

86. 'Current Topics', ibid., supplement, 15 May 1895.

87. While some planters bribed the kanganies to get labour from other estates there were allegations that some planters after paying off their gangs on tundu tried to get their gangs to desert back. In the heat of the labour shortage of 1907 one planter castigated the fellow community in the following words. "We are all ... a set of crimps". YPAC 1907, a general meeting of PAC of 14 February 1908, p. 86.

time-consuming.[88] Particularly, when faced with a large yield, the temptation was to engage a "local" gang which had skilled hands unlike a fresh gang from South India.[89] Besides, sending cash advances to the "Coast" was risky and required trustworthy kanganies.[90] But all employers did not have the same reliable connections with the labour-supplying villages of South India. The personal link which existed in the coffee period between the kangany, his labour gang, and the planter tended to decline in the tea period with the relative decline in the number of proprietor-planters and the rapid growth of large-scale tea companies. The general reluctance of the planters to recruit from South India for the peak season on the estates is seen in the repeated requests embodied in the various resolutions and circulars of the Planters' Associations urging the planters to recruit their own supplies of labour from the "Coast" without resorting to the practice of taking up "local" labour gangs. Such resolutions were passed and circulars were sent out to the planters by the Planters' Associations virtually at every time when the labour shortage was felt. For instance, in 1890, the Planters' Association and the Chamber of Commerce in a joint circular to all planters pointed out that

> ... it is desired to impress on all employers of labour the necessity for NOT increasing local advances during the busy season. Particularly during March, April, and May Canganies take advantage of the demand which arises for labour to obtain large extra advances not to be sent to the Coast but for local purposes, and it is most necessary that all employers should combine in refusing any extra local advance at that season. 91

The planters' preference to take up "local" gangs during peak seasons set off a state of competition among them for immigrant labour

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88. 'The Labour Question', The views of the Chairman of PAC, ibid., 13 May 1895.

89. 'Labour Question', Report of the special Committee of PAC, YPAC 1902-1903, p. 12.

90. 'The Cooly Labour Question and Crimping', by X, COO, 20 March 1891.

91. Circular on 'Coast Advances and the Labour Supply', issued by the PAC and C of C, PPAC 1891, Correspondence, p. xxix.

already in the Island. The shifting of gangs between estates by the kanganies naturally had an unsettling effect on the labour force. Absenteeism and labour turnover became high. Apart from travel time between estates, a gang usually stopped work a few days prior to their exit from one estate and took some time to settle down in the new estate. What is important is that this vicious circle became highly operative at the very season of peak work-load on the estates when the estates not only required more hands but also required a greater degree of work commitment from the existing labour gangs.[92] Even when a fair minority of estates or districts were short-supplied with labour, it inevitably had a widespread unsettling effect on the labour force in general.

Apart from importing labour and also competing for local labour gangs, the planters adopted two other methods to overcome their heavy seasonal labour requirements. An attempt was made to get the Sinhalese to work on the estates during the busy months. By the time of the tea period, several factors had tended to abate the mid-nineteenth century aversion to estate work at least among some sections of the Sinhalese villagers. They were a new generation born and bred in the colonial socio-economic context. The stunting of village expansion in some areas with the growth of plantations together with the natural growth of population inevitably had their impact on the village economy. At least in some districts, the British land revenue administration in the 1880s rendered some Sinhalese peasants landless and they tended to drift to the estates in search of employment. Besides, most of the new plantations which were opened up in the period from 1880 to 1910 were in the Sabaragamuwa and the Western Provinces and a few in the Southern Province--in areas nearer to the low-country Sinhalese villages.[93] However, the impact of

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92. 'Mr. Charles Young's Opinion', COO, 14 May 1895.

93. According to Ceylon Census returns a greater number of low-country Sinhalese worked on the estates than Kandyans. The Census Reports of 1901 and 1911 reveal that in these years the percentage of the low-country and the Kandyan Sinhalese to the total estate labour force approximated 5 and 2.5 respectively.

these factors were not sufficiently powerful to induce the Sinhalese to offer themselves for wage labour in any significant numbers. It is difficult to get precise information on the turn up of the Sinhalese for plantation work in our period. At the census counts of 1891, 1901, and 1911, it was found that approximately 19,500, 24,500, and 38,500 Sinhalese worked in the estates in the respective years.[94] These figures, however, were underestimations, for the number of Sinhalese who were permanently resident on the estates were small. Most of those who worked in the estates were non-resident labourers who preferred to travel daily from their villages.[95] Qualitative evidence reveals that even as day-labourers the Sinhalese formed only a small section of the plantation labour force. Most of the Sinhalese males who had permanent association with the estates were skilled men such as carpenters and masons. The aversion of the Sinhalese to reside in the estates and the poor means of transport contributed to hinder a steady flow of village labour to the estates. At any rate, even in our period the basic economic factors did not operate so as to attract a large number of Sinhalese for estate work. It was mainly the plantations bordering the Sinhalese villages which succeeded in obtaining indigenous labour to work on the estates on a significant scale. By and large, this situation existed mainly in the planting districts of Kegalle, Kalutara, Ratnapura, Badulla, Matara, and Galle.[96] Several planters in these districts established contacts with the Sinhalese villages. Two factors, however, interrupted the flow of Sinhalese labour even in these

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94. According to these figures the percentages of Sinhalese to the total plantation labour force in the years 1891, 1901, and 1911 were 6, 7.5, and 7.5 respectively.
Ceylon Census Report, 1891, Vol. II, p. 249.
Ibid., 1901, Vol. II, pp. 598ff.
Ibid., 1911, Vol. on population by Sex etc., p. 360.

95. Ibid., 1891, Vol. I, p. 42.

96. AnR of Sabaragamuwa DPA for 1907, COW, 8 February 1908.
Editorial, ibid., 22 February 1908.
AnR of Udapussellawa DPA for 1891, COO , 17 February 1891.

districts during the peak season on the estates. First, the traditional Sinhalese New Year started in mid-April. For the Sinhalese it was a season of social and religious activities. They usually kept away from all occupational work for at least one week. Secondly, the peak season of the labour demand in the paddy fields was from February to early April.[97]

However, where estates had established regular contacts with the villages in the neighbourhood, the Sinhalese turned out to be a useful source of labour for the tea planters as a supplementary labour force to cope with the work-load during the peak seasons.[98] It was possible to lay-off easily Sinhalese labour at the end of the busy season. The problems of providing cash advances, transport costs, estate medical care, and accommodation facilities did not exist to trouble the planters in case of Sinhalese labour. These factors and the relative inaccessibility to sources of labour explains the offer of relatively high daily wage rates and also the weekly payment of wages to the Sinhalese.[99] Especially, in years of widespread shortage of immigrant labour, as for instance in 1907, a keen interest was shown by the planters to explore the possibilities of obtaining Sinhalese labour.[100] The Labour Commission appointed by the Government in 1907 to inquire into the plantation labour problems had as one of its terms of reference the task of examining the question whether it was desirable to take any measures to promote and encourage the

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97. Planting Notes from Rakwana, ibid., 16 April 1891.
Planting Notes from Haputale, ibid., 29 January 1892.
Planting Notes from Neboda, ibid., 2 February 1892.

98. Cey. Lab. Com. 1908, Report, pp. xvii-xviii.

99. The Sinhalese tea pluckers were paid approximately 40 and 35 cents per day for male and female labourers respectively as against the daily wage rates of the immigrant tea pluckers which stood at an average of 33 and 25 cents.

100. Editorial, COW, 20 January 1908.
Annual general meeting of PAC, 14 February 1908, YPAC 1907, pp. 80-82.
Cey. Lab. Com. 1908, Report, p. v.

employment of Sinhalese on the estates. The Commission found "... no evidence to show that there is any portion of the Sinhalese population which is desirous of obtaining work upon estates and is unable to obtain it."[101] On the whole, the supply of Sinhalese labour was found to be numerically small, less dependable, irregular, and entirely a question of locality.

On the other hand, especially in the years after 1902, the planters began to adopt widely a policy of offering incentives to their immigrant labour gangs to get them to do extra work during the peak season.[102] Some planters offered higher wage rates for evening work beyond the routine hours and also for Sunday work. Others paid their labourers by piece-work, for instance according to the number of pounds of tea plucked. As inducements, the planters began to pay the labourers their extra earnings weekly. At times, the labourers worked on Sunday for the higher Sunday wage and were inclined to skip a day mid-week. But the system worked satisfactorily because it augmented the total earnings of the labourers and also helped the planters to cope with excess work. But during some years, the available peak season labour force was found to be inadequate even with overtime work and it became necessary for the planters to obtain fresh labour gangs.

In the following pages we will attempt a chronological survey of the available data--that is, the rates of advances and qualitative evidence--on the adequacy of the labour supply with a view to find out the frequency with which the seasonal labour shortage occurred in the planting sector in our period. The bulk of the qualitative evidence for the years after 1896 is found in the Annual Reports of the District Planters Associations. These reports invariably included a brief account of the state of the labour market in each district. For convenience of

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101. Ibid., xvii.
Editorial, COO, 16 January 1892.
Editorial, Ibid., 20 February 1892.

102. See below, pp. 188-190.

analysis the available qualitative evidence in these reports is set out in the form of a chart at the end of the chapter.

In the years 1878-9, the District Planters' Associations maintained details of the prevalent rates of advances paid to the kanganies to procure labour in the various districts.[103] From this set of information it is possible to draw a scale of rates which is useful as a base to compare subsequent movement of the rates of advances. It is seen from these reports that the highest advances given out in the late 1870s was Rs.10 per labourer. While Rs.5 to Rs.10 was regarded as moderate, less than Rs.5 was considered as low. The same reports show that the estates in most districts paid the low rate and that payments of Rs.10 per head was very rare. The districts which paid the moderate rates reported that these rates were undergoing further reduction. Some of the estates found the offer of advances hardly necessary to procure labour. Some planters totally refused to give out advances. Of the 22 District Planters' Association only one--Madulsima and Hewa Eliya District Planters' Association--reported that the advances were inclined to be heavy thus revealing the regional state of the labour market in the locality. The overall downswing in the rates of advances in these years was the result of the presence of an adequate supply of labour due to the heavy influx of the immigrants into the Island to escape from the virulent Indian famine of 1876-7. The planters were quite outspoken about their satisfactory supply of labour during the late 1870s and the planting reports from both up and low-country districts were virtually unanimous on the abundant supply of immigrant labour.

In the years 1880-5, these scale rates underwent further reduction. At times the system of advances was abandoned altogether. More often the planters refused to give advances.[104] Resolutions were

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103. Quarterly District Reports for 1877, PPAC 1878, pp. 131-161.
Quarterly District Reports for 1878, ibid. 1879, pp. 1-78.

104. A general meeting of Badulla DPA, 31 May 1890, C00, 7 June 1890.

passed by several tea Companies and District Planters' Associations advising the planters to discontinue the practice of giving out advances.[105] J. Ferguson, one of the well-informed contemporary authorities on the planting sector, aptly pointed out that "the superabundant supply of coolies led to the complete abandonment of the Advance System."[106] Though a large number of immigrant labourers returned to South India and the tide of immigration declined during these years of economic depression in the Island, the immigrant labour force appears to have been adequate to meet the depressed demand for labour on the plantations during this period. Even after a reduction of the daily wage rates of the labourers, the planters had little to complain about their labour supply because the relative decline in the demand for labour in these years appears to have been greater than the decline in the supply of labour over the period. Where labour shortage did occur, it was isolated and spasmodic.

The state of surplus labour began to change with the revived prosperity of the plantation sector after 1886. The state of the labour market during these years fluctuated almost annually and it is not possible to identify the times of labour scarcity and its causes without virtually a year to year analysis of the data on the supply and demand of labour.

The signs of the approaching rise in the demand for labour were seen as early as 1885 when the rates of advances began to take an upward drift. In the years 1886-9, the planters paid rates of approximately Rs.10 per head--a rate considered fairly high in the late 1870's.[107] But the payment of Rs.10 does not necessarily mean that the planters were

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105. 'Coast Advances and Coolies' Pay', Circular of 18 tea exporting companies in Colombo, ibid., 4 June 1880.
A general meeting of Rakwana DPA, 18 May 1880, ibid., 24 June 1880.

106. J. Ferguson, Ceylon Handbook and Directory, 1885, pp. 336, 105.
Ibid., 1887-8, p. 127.

107. 'Payment of Wages to Coolies--Monthly or Quarterly. No. I', by Superintendent, COO, 2 June 1890.
Editorial, ibid., 6 June 1890.

faced with a shortage of immigrant labour. During the late 1870^{s} and early 1880^{s}, the planters had virtually suspended recruiting labour from South India. Rs.10 was about the average cost of recruiting and transporting labour from South India to the estates. Thus, the payment of Rs.10 as coast advances in the years 1886-9 reveals rather the revival of labour recruitment by the estates than a prevalence of widespread labour shortage in the Island. According to qualitative evidence the general state of the labour supply was satisfactory during these years though some planting districts did feel some shortage of labour, especially during the busy season of 1886—a year of downswing in migration due largely to the favourable agricultural seasons which occurred in South India.[108] The slight upward swing in the rates of advances in 1886 actuated the Planters' Association of Ceylon and the Chamber of Commerce to issue a joint memorandum requesting the planters not to exceed Rs.10 per labourer as advances.[109]

In spite of the fairly satisfactory state of the labour market the planters showed an intense concern over the question of labour supply throughout 1886-9.[110] This concern reflects an anxiety about the future labour supplies rather than a current labour shortage. The planters of the late 1880^{s} were annually extending their tea acreage.[111] While the tea acreage in yield was not large in the late 1880^{s} a heavy demand was bound to occur when the new acreage came into production in the near future. The overall attitude of the planters during these years is seen in the following extract from the Annual Report of the Planters' Association

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108. A special general meeting of PAC, 18 September 1886, PPAC 1887, pp. 44-48
Sec. of PAC to Sec. of C of C., 15 November 1886, ibid., Correspondence, p. clxxi.

109. 'Cooly Labour Supply for Ceylon Estates', Memorandum of Suggestions and Information issued by the PAC and C of C, ibid., 1888, pp. 152-153.

110. A general meeting of PAC, 7 December 1888, ibid., 1889, pp. 60-68.
Thirty-sixth AnR of PAC, ibid., 1890, p. xxv.

111. See Appendix D.

for 1886. "A very large number of coolies must during the next few years ... be procured, and the necessity for a combined effort to start a fresh stream of immigration cannot be too strongly urged".[112]

The planters' diffidence about the future labour supply was confirmed in 1890 when the young tea industry faced its first serious shortage of labour. There was a momentous outcry among the planters in the Press and in their Associations; and the central Association reported that "... labour was greatly insufficient to the requirements, and a great loss of leaf, and consequently of money, was sustained by the Planting Community".[113] While the usual rates of advances fluctuated between Rs.10 and Rs.15, at times, it exceeded this amount. The Planters' Association and the Chamber of Commerce reacted in the usual manner of issuing a joint circular requesting the employers to limit the rate to Rs.10.[114] The qualitative evidence on the extent of the inadequacy of labour in 1890 needs to be viewed with some degree circumspection because the planters tended to exaggerate the problem of labour shortage in their fierce attack on the strict enforcement of the Ceylon Government quarantine regulations in that year. Due to a virulent cholera outbreak in India the Ceylon Government temporarily closed the North Road for immigrant traffic and also subjected the ships arriving in Colombo to the letter of the regulations. The planters attributed the labour shortage to these measures, agitated to get the Government decisions rescinded, and in the process raised the issue of labour shortage to a hyperbole. There is no doubt that the planters faced a shortage of labour, though to a lesser extent than they contended. Neither was the shortage mainly due to the Government quarantine measures. Shipping between Tuticorin and Colombo was suspended only once by the shipping company as a protest against the Government decisions. The closure of the North Road took place in the months when the seasonal migration to the Island usually assumed an upward trend and the news of the sudden stoppage of the Ceylon Government Immigration

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112. 'Cooly Labour Supply for Ceylon Estates', Memorandum of Suggestions and Information issued by PAC and C of C, PPAC 1888, pp. 152-153.
113. Thirty-seventh AnR of PAC, ibid., 1891, p. xxviii.
114. Circular on 'Coast Advances and the Labour Supply', issued by the PAC and C of C, Ibid., Correspodence, p. xxviii.

Service between Paumben and Mannar no doubt discouraged migration from the interior of South India to the sea port and also inconvenienced the immigrants en route. But the North Road remained closed only for a maximum of two months and it cannot be accepted as a satisfactory explanation for the overall state of labour scarcity throughout the planting districts.[115] Neither is it possible to agree fully with the view that the greater attractions of rival fields of labour emigration outside Ceylon was responsible for the migrant labour shortage which occurred in Ceylon in 1890.[116] The chief rival of Ceylon in South India, viz., Malaya, did not offer overall conditions more attractive than the conditions on the plantations in Ceylon until the dawn of the present century.[117] At any rate, the trend of labour migration from South India to other parts of the world, besides Ceylon, did not register an appreciable increase in 1890. The main reasons for the shortage of 1890 were two-fold. For the first time in the history of the tea industry in the Island a large acreage of tea came into production in 1889-91. Of this, the heaviest increase in any single year took place in 1890.[118] Labour immigration itself was on the increase in response to the rise in demand and also because of the increase in the food-grain prices in South India in 1890. But, on the whole, the supply fell short of the demand because though the planters had shown great anxiety during 1886-9 about their future labour supplies they had not adequately intensified their recruiting activities nor had they brought about improvements in the method of recruitment and conveyance of labour so as to meet the relatively heavy demand for labour on the tea

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115. Telegram from Col. Sec. to Chairman of PAC, 25 April 1890, PPAC 1891, Correspondence, p. xxxvi.
Col. Sec. to Chairman of PAC, 1 May 1890, ibid., p. xxxvi.

116. L. R. Jayawardena, unpublished dissertation for research fellowship, Cambridge, 1960, chap. 4.

117. See below, pp. 163-164.

118. Between 1889-91, the tea acreage in yield increased by more than two and half times. Almost one half of this increase took place in 1890.
See Appendix D.

estates. It was the tea planters' first taste of a widespread shortage of labour. Besides, it was only when a large acreage came into production and the tea exports increase after 1890 that the tea planters were able to plough back substantial finances by way of coast advances to encourage the inflow of labour. Secondly, the year 1890 witnessed an outbreak of an unusually heavy epidemic of influenza among the plantation labour population which affected the out-turn of labour to some extent in most of the planting districts.[119]

The labour shortage of 1890 was short lived. Though a few districts felt some shortage of labour in the peak working months of 1891, the supply on the whole was adequate. In the following year the Planters' Association reported with satisfaction that "labour was plentiful in all districts", and that a healthy state in regards to the labour supply had come into being.[120] The famine conditions which prevailed in South India in the years 1891-2 together with the better mode of transport made available with the improvement of the facilities by the British India Steam Navigation Company helped the inflow. Even during the peak working months of 1891-2 the planters found the available labour sufficient to cope with the yield.

Despite the drop in immigration due to the favourable agricultural season in 1893 the satisfactory state of the labour market continued largely because of heavy labour migration which had occurred during the two preceding years.[121] Nevertheless, signs of a mild labour shortage and rising rates of advances was felt in some districts in 1893.[122] The overall sufficiency of the labour supply in 1893 seems to have been achieved

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119. Thirty-seventh AnR of PAC, PPAC 1891, p. xxviii.
The AnR states that, "In the months of April and May, owing in a great measure to the prevalence of influenza and the sickness attendant on it, coming as it did when there was most leaf to be plucked, the labor was greatly insufficient to the requirements ...".
See also, Planting Notes from Matale, Nawalapitiya, and Haputale in COO, 19 April 1890.

120. Thirty-ninth AnR of PAC, PPAC 1893, p. xxv.

121. Fortieth AnR of PAC, PPAC 1894, p. xxix.

122. Ibid., p. xxviii.

at the cost of increased advances, which were obviously necessary to spur the labourers to migrate in a favourable year in agriculture in South India. Besides, the abnormal rise in the cost of living of the labourers due to heavy increase in the price of rice in 1892-3 reacted in augmenting the demand for advances by the labourers.[123] In the Press and in the District Planters' Association meetings, the increase in the rates of cash advances figured as the most pressing grievance of the planters pertaining to their supply of labour.

In 1894, the seasonal shortage of labour was felt in several planting districts and the rates of advances began to rise with the planters paying between Rs.20 to Rs.30 and infrequently paying even Rs.40 per labourer.[124] The shortage recurred during the spring of 1895 with greater intensity and the rates of advances registered a new peak of between Rs.40 to Rs.50.[125] Though the situation improved in the spring of 1896, the supply continued to lag behind the demand and the advances remained high.

The 1894-6 labour shortage was, by and large, the result of the favourable agricultural seasons which occurred in South India in the years 1893-5 at a time when the total tea acreage as well as the annual rate of tea production in the Island was on a rapid increase. The immediate effect of the good agricultural seasons in South India was to cause a drop in the inflow of labour which compelled the planters to offer high rates of advances, especially in 1895-6 to induce migration. The price of tea in the U.K. market was on the decline since 1890 and the planters viewed the rise in the rates advances with apprehension. A plethora of

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123. See below, Table 4.7 (p. 200).

124. Planting Notes from Nawalapitiya, COO, 24 May 1894.
'Planting News from Central Province', by Wanderer, ibid., 26 May 1894.
Planting Notes from Kelani Valley, ibid., 31 July 1894.

125. Annual meeting of the Scottish Ceylon Tea Company, 3 June 1895.
ibid., 4 June 1895.
Current Topics, ibid., (Supplement), 15 May 1895.

suggestions and schemes were mooted in the press and the planters' associations in these years with a view to restrict the rates of advances and the planting opinion was steadily moving towards combined action among themselves to quell the demands of the kanganies.[126] But in the context of the shortage of labour and intense competition among the planters, it was found impossible to get the planters to adopt successful combined action.

It was only in 1897 that a scheme for combined action was finally agreed by the majority of the planters.[127] The year was conducive for such an effort. On the one hand, the U.K. tea prices showed a further decline in 1897 and the fear of a slump occurring in the tea industry was in the air. The planters strongly felt the need to cut tea production costs. More important, the year 1897 saw an adequate supply of labour and competition among the planters for labour became marginal.[128] The general mood among the planters therefore was favourable to combined action, in order to avert a future repetition of the state of intense competition and rising advances which they had experienced in 1894-6.

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126. 'The Labour Question', by UNITAS SALUS NOSTRA, ibid., 25 May 1895.

127. Hitherto, combination among the employers was attempted at district level.
Annual general meeting of Kalutara DPA, 20 December 1890, ibid., 23 December 1890.

128. There is one set of evidence which suggests that the year 1897 was one of a labour shortage. An official estimate of the labour force carried out by the DPAs at the request of the PAC revealed that there was a labour shortage throughout the planting districts (Forty-fourth AnR of PAC, PPAC 1898, p. xviii; Annual general meeting of PAC, 17 February 1897, ibid., pp. 4-5). It is, however, important to realise the purpose of this survey. The PAC in a circular to the DPAs pointed out that the aim of the survey was to utilize its data to submit to the Government with a view to obtain Government aid to bring about improvements in the overall system of recruitment and conveyance. (A general meeting of the Kelani Valley DPA,'2 April 1897, letter from Sec. of PAC to Kelani Valley DPA, dated 25 March 1897). Therefore, the DPAs were inclined to show that there was a general shortage of labour. It is important to note that the statistics on the size of the labour force given at the above survey fell short of the number given in the regular Quarterly Returns for the same year by nearly one-third. Besides, other available evidence reveal that the supply of labour was adequate to the demand in 1897. (see Figure 3.4).

At the initiative of the Planters' Association, the Ceylon Labour Federation was formed in 1897 with the main objective of avoiding competition among the planters for "local" labour gangs.[129] Hitherto, all action to restrict the rise in the advances were confined to the issuing of circulars by the Planters' Association. But this step had proved ineffective and the planters attributed this to two factors. The Planters Association did not include all the planters in the Island. More important, it had no power to enforce its decisions and particularly when the planters were at variance in their views it could act merely in an advisory capacity. The Labour Federation was an attempt to get the planters to individually commit themselves firmly to specific rules and regulations framed by themselves to guide their conduct in giving out advances. Thereby it sought to minimize the mutual suspicion among the planters in matters pertaining to their labour supply.

To attain their objective, the federated planters agreed that no member should pay in excess of the "tundu price" in taking up a local labour gang. The idea was to make the shifting of labour gangs unprofitable to the kanganies, for where the "transfer price" was higher than the "tundu price" of a gang the difference partly represented the profit of the kangany.[130] Secondly, the members decided that no member should engage a "local" labour gang unless the gang possessed a discharge note issued by the former employer or without due reference to him. The aim of this clause was to tie the labour gangs to their estates until the employers decided to pay-off, for if the clause was strictly adhered to, a gang moving out of an estate without the employer's consent would not be able to procure employment elsewhere in the planting districts.

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129. A committee meeting of the PAC, 14 May 1897, PPAC 1898, p. 50. For the correspondence on the formation of the Labour Federation, see ibid., correspondence, pp. xlii-xlvi, ccx-ccxii.

130. The Labour Federation of Ceylon, ibid., 1899, Appendix B. Sec. of PAC to Sec. of C of C, 4 November 1898, enclosure, 'Rules of the Labour Federation of Ceylon', ibid., correspondence, pp. 13-14.

The initial response to the Labour Federation was encouraging. By the end of 1898 planters representing approximately two-third of the tea acreage had joined the scheme. But a substantial group of planters was still out of it and a recalcitrant minority could thwart the smooth working of the scheme. The scheme itself was defective in some ways. It ignored a crucial aspect of the plantation labour system. The difference between the "tundu price" of a gang and the "transfer price" did not always represent the kangany's profit alone; it also included the gang's debt to others, particularly to the shop-keeper and the money-lender, for loans raised by the kangany to maintain the gang. And the kangany had necessarily to obtain such debts partly because of the inadequate wage rates on the estates and also because of the method of deferred payment of the labourers' wages by the planters, usually once in two or three months. Attempts to restrict the cash advances to the "tundu price" was unrealistic unless such attempts were accompanied by measures to bring about several other important changes in the plantation labour system so as to make outside credit superfluous to the labourers. Besides, there is the basic question whether it is possible, in an economic context which permitted free enterprise and competition between approximately 2,000 plantations, to side-track the basic laws of supply-demand by means of a voluntary scheme which did not find unanimous support from the entrepreneurs.

However, during the first four years of its existence the Labour Federation appeared to the planters to be working satisfactorily, though a few planters were found wanting in their adherence to its spirit.[131] But the fact is that during 1898-1901 the Federation was not seriously subjected to a test of its potentiality because these were years of an

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131. A general meeting of the Dikoya DPA, 23 January 1900, COH, 24 January 1900.
Planting Notes from Dolosbage, ibid., 26 February 1900.
AnR of Pussellawa DPA for 1900, ibid., 11 February 1901.

abundant supply of labour.[132] The South Indian famines of 1898 and 1900 together with the recession in the tea industry in the Island were the decisive factors. Large outstanding advances given out during the previous period of the tea mania were gradually reduced during these years.[133] The District Planters' Associations reported that the rates of advances had decidedly decreased after 1898 and expressed the belief that these would continue to decline.[134] It is significant that such reports should come from particularly those districts situated a long way from the main network of rail and trunk-road transport and therefore relatively inaccessible to labour; districts such as Rakwana, Passara, Udupussellawa, and Nuwara Eliya.

In 1902, however, the planters began to experience a recurrence of labour shortage despite the lack of an increased demand for labour due to the persistence of the slump in the tea industry. The Planters' Association pointed out that the labour question "would appear to be causing some inconvenience to producers; many gardens are experiencing some difficulty in obtaining an adequate supply."[135] In 1903, the situation became worse and most of the planting districts suffered from labour scarcity and widespread restlessness of the labour force.[136] The rates of advances which had reasserted an upward trend in 1902 registered a steep rise in 1903.[137] Though some planters were able to procure labour at rates below Rs.40, anything between Rs.40 and Rs.80 became quite common.

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132. See below, Figure 3.4.

133. AnR of Passara DPA for 1898, COO, 6 February 1899.
AnR of Maskeliya DPA for 1898, ibid., 9 February 1899.
AnR of Udapussellawa DPA for 1898, ibid., 18 February 1899.

134. AnR of Rakwana DPA for 1898, ibid., 28 January 1899.
AnR of Badulla DPA for 1898, ibid., 8 February 1899.
AnR of Nuwara Eliya DPA for 1898, ibid., 13 February 1899.

135. Forty-ninth AnR of PAC, YPAC 1902-3, p. 5.

136. See below, Figure 3.4.
Annual general meeting of PAC, 17 February 1903, YPAC 1903-4, p. 4.
Editorial, COW, 25 February 1903.

137. Planting Notes from Dolosbage, ibid., 3 February 1902.
'The Labour Question', by Old fogie, ibid., 16 December 1902.
Editorial, ibid., 21 January 1903.

Some planters even paid Rs.100 per labourer.[138] The Planters' Association pointed out that "... the reported scarcity of Tamil labour on the estates and the reported excess of advances offered to gangs of coolies to induce them to move from estate to another, was again urgent."[139]

In the years 1902-3 the Labour Federation faced the first serious test of its strength. Confronted with the shortage of labour and intense competition among the planters, the Federation found itself torn asunder.[140]

The planters began to search other alternatives for combined action both to increase the flow of labour and to restrict competition of advances. The need was strongly felt because of the persistence of the slump in the tea industry and the fear of the labour problem becoming acute in the wake of the growth of rubber planting in the Island as well as in Malaya. More than ever before, the labour recruiting activities of the Malayan planters were beginning to be felt by the Ceylon planters.

The planters' reaction to the labour problems of 1902-3 was two-fold. First, as seen earlier on, the Ceylon Labour Commission was inagurated in Trichinopoly in 1904 mainly for the purpose of handling cash advances sent to South India, supervise and assist the kanganies in their recruiting activities, and also to stimulate labour migration to the Island.[141] The Commission turned out to be a big success in the ensuing years. Secondly, to tackle the problem of rising "local" cash advances the Planters' Association decided on a ceiling of Rs.30 per labourer on all cash advances.[142] But the "30 rupees limit scheme" had all the weaknesses which its predecessor,

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138. AnR of Pussellawa DPA for 1903, ibid., 23 March 1903.
AnR of Rangala DPA for 1903, ibid.

139. Fiftieth AnR of PAC, YPAC 1903-4, no pagination.

140. Resolutions of Haputale and Rakwana DPAs, Committee meeting of PAC, 17 February 1904, ibid., p. 146.

141. See above, pp. 88-91.

142. Annual general meeting of PAC, 17 February 1904, Resolution adopted on the recommendation of the Labour Sub-committee of PAC, ibid., p. 67.

the Labour Federation, suffered.[143] Both were fair-weather crafts and collapsed at the sight of labour problems. The scheme was eventually abandoned.[144]

The "30 rupee limit scheme" is important in that it reveals that by 1903-4, the planters had officially accepted as moderate a scale rate of advances different from the ones they had hitherto considered as too high in procuring labour. Whereas in the 1890[s] Rs.10 was regarded as a moderate rate and Rs.30 as very high, it appears that by 1904 Rs.30 had come to be accepted by the planters as the moderate rate.[145] Thereafter, to the end of our period, Rs.30 continued to be regarded by the planters as the reasonable rate. Anything below Rs.30 was considered low and a sign of an adequate state of labour and anything above as high revealing a proportionate increase in the demand for labour.

The new scale rate was an outcome of manifold factors. The scarcity of labour in 1902-3 had put up the total indebtedness of the labourers. More important, the competition for labour was on the increase. Higher advances were required to obtain labour from South India partly because of competition from the Malayan labour recruiter and also because of the increase in the cost of transportation of labour from South India with the closure of the North Road for immigrant traffic.

The supply of immigrant labour in 1904 was, on the whole, better than during the previous couple of years. Though several districts complained about a scarcity of labour the bulk of the planting districts appears to have had an adequate supply of labour. The rates of advances

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143. AnR of Nuwara Eliya DPA for 1904, COW, 26 January 1905.
AnR of Pussellawa DPA for 1904, ibid., 1 February 1905.
AnR of Ambagamuwa DPA for 1904, ibid., 2 February 1905.
The "30 rupee limit" was even more defective than the Labour Federation scheme because it laid down one limit for all planting districts irrespective of the varying local circumstances.

144. AnR of Dikoya DPA for 1906, ibid., 18 January 1907.
AnR of Dimbulla DPA for 1906, ibid., 22 January 1907.
AnR of Pussellawa DPA for 1906, ibid., 4 February 1907.

145. Annual general meeting of PAC, 17 February 1904, YPAC 1903-4, pp. 67, 74.

recorded a slight fall but the rates continued to be well above Rs.30 and at times reached approximately Rs.60 per head.[146] The supply of labour registered a striking improvement in 1905-6.[147] While the demand for labour continued to increase in these years with the extension of the rubber acreage and the revived prosperity of the tea industry, virtually all the planting districts in the Island reported that the supply of labour was adequate even during the peak months on the estates. This was largely the outcome of near famine conditions in South India in 1905 which propelled heavy migration into the Island. Though the rates of advances paid to procure labour tended to decline the total indebtedness of the labour gangs remained fairly high because the kanganies had obtained heavy cash advances during the previous years of labour shortage--rates so high that the labourers failed to work-off their debt accounts in any substantial measure in a couple of years. Besides, the rising cost of living in a context of lagging wage rates left the labourers very little by way of balance of wages to pay off their debts.

The year 1907 witnessed a change in the demand-supply situation of labour for the worse. The year was one of good harvests in South India. Besides, there was an increase in labour migration to Malaya with the inauguration in that year of the system of giving free passage to the labourers travelling from South India to Malaya. However, with the increase in the food-grain prices in South India in the years 1908-10 the labour supply to the plantations in Ceylon improved. During these years the planters, on the whole, found the supply of labour adequate to meet the demand on the plantations.

We have seen so far that the seasonal shortage of labour which occurred in the Island was largely confined to the years of good agricultural seasons in South India. We have also seen that the shortage was due to

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146. A general meeting of Haputale DPA, 10 December 1904, COW, 13 December 1904.

147. Fifty-second AnR of PAC, YPAC 1905, p. 78.
Fifty-third AnR of PAC, ibid., 1906, p. 100.

the failure on the part of planters to increase the inflow of labour during such years of good harvests so as to adequately meet the demand on the plantations. There is also the hypothesis that the kangany played an important role in bringing about the seasonal shortage of labour in the Island. Information about the supply-demand situation of labour was imperfect on the side of both the planter and the labourer. To a large extent both sides depended on the kangany. Though the recruiting activities of the kanganies were subject to supervision with the inauguration of the Ceylon Labour Commission in Trichinopoly in 1904 the kangany continued to be the main supplier of labour to the estates. Because of his crucial position in the labour market it was possible for him to shift gangs from one estate to another and thereby create a state of labour shortage even when the overall supply of labour in the Island was adequate. Some planters alleged that the kanganies were reluctant to recruit fresh gangs of labourers from South India in order to maintain an artificial shortage of labour in the Island.[148] While there is no conclusive evidence about any organised effort on the part of the kanganies to arrest the inflow of labour there is no doubt that the kanganies tried to create an artificial shortage of labour by shifting labour gangs between estates at peak seasons of activity on the plantations.

There is also another hypothesis that we need to examine in some detail, namely, that the shortage of labour in the Island was due to the greater attractions of other fields of labour migration from South India. Agricultural labourers migrated from South India to Malaya, Burma, Natal, Mauritius, and Fiji. However, the absolute numbers who went from the Madras Presidency to Natal, Mauritius, and Fiji, were very small. Labour for the South Indian plantations in Mysore, Coorg, Nilgiris, and the Wynaad were drawn mainly from among the Malayali and the Canarese. Though

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148. A special general meeting of PAC, 18 September 1886, PPAC 1887, p. 44. 'The Labour Question and Monthly Payment: No. I', by G. F. W., COO, 13 July 1890.

some Tamil labour was employed in these plantations in our period, the South Indian planters did not appear either in the records of the Ceylon Planters' Association or those of the Ceylon Labour Commission in Trichinopoly as competitors of the Ceylon kanganies in the recruitment of labour. There were Burma and Malaya towards which together with Ceylon the Indian Government adopted an open-frontier policy as regards labour migration. Burma drew a large number of Indian labourers especially to work in the rice industry. But the bulk of the migrants to Burma was from beyond the Madras Presidency. A sizable group of Tamils from South India also went to Burma. Though some of them were from Tanjore, the largest number who went to Burma came from the northern districts in the Presidency; districts such as North Arcot, South Arcot, and Chingleput. Besides, the year round employment opportunities in the tea plantations in Ceylon, the relative proximity of the Island to South India, and the system of family recruitment spelled out important advantages to the migrants coming to Ceylon as against the high seasonality of the labour demand in the rice industry and the system of recruitment of adults to work in Burma.

According to the documents of the Ceylon Planters' Association and the Ceylon Labour Commission in Trichinopoly the one main competitor of the Ceylon planter for South Indian Tamil labour was the labour recruiter from Malaya.[149] Malaya like Burma recruited large numbers from the northern districts in the Presidency. But at the same time the Malayan planter was increasingly penetrating in our period into the southernmost Tamil districts of Trichinopoly, Madura, and Tinnevelly which the Ceylon planters had hitherto looked upon as their preserve. The progress of coffee planting in Malaya in the late nineteenth century resulted in an increase in labour recruiting in South India. However, up to 1897 the Malayan planters were at a disadvantage due to the fact that until that year the Indian Government imposed certain restrictions on labour migration

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149. AnR of CLC for 1906, YPAC 1906, p. 18.
AnR of CLC for 1907, ibid., 1907, p. 11.

to Malaya. It was mainly after 1897 and more particularly in the first decade of the twentieth century with the rapid progress of rubber planting in Malaya that the Malayan planters intensified their recruiting efforts. Improvements were brought about in the method of labour recruitment, shipping charges between South India and Malaya were reduced, wages in Malaya were increased, and finally in 1907 the Malayan planters federated themselves to provide free passage for the labourers going from South India. These improvements had the effect of increasing the flow of labour migration to Malaya.[150] However, as with Burma, with Malaya too Ceylon had the distinct advantage of proximity and also of having a system of family migration with employment opportunities for practically every member of the family. There is no doubt that competition of the Malayan recruiters was felt by the Ceylon planters particularly in the first decade of the present century. But it is not possible to assess the extent of the impact of such competition on the supply of labour to the plantations in Ceylon. Among other factors such as the increase in the cost of labour transport to the Island and the rise in the cost of living, the Malayan competition also contributed to increase the rates of advances which the Ceylon planters had to offer to obtain an adequate supply of labour from South India.

However, the two explanations we have examined above, viz., the role of the kangany and that of the Malayan recruiter, appear to be less significant among the different variables available to us to explain the fundamental causes of the periodic labour shortage which occurred in the Island. The basic factors which influenced the supply-demand situation of labour were the fortunes of the agricultural seasons in South India and the demand price offered by the Ceylon planters. The influence of the kangany and the competition of the Malayan recruiter was something which operated throughout the years when Ceylon planters experienced an adequacy

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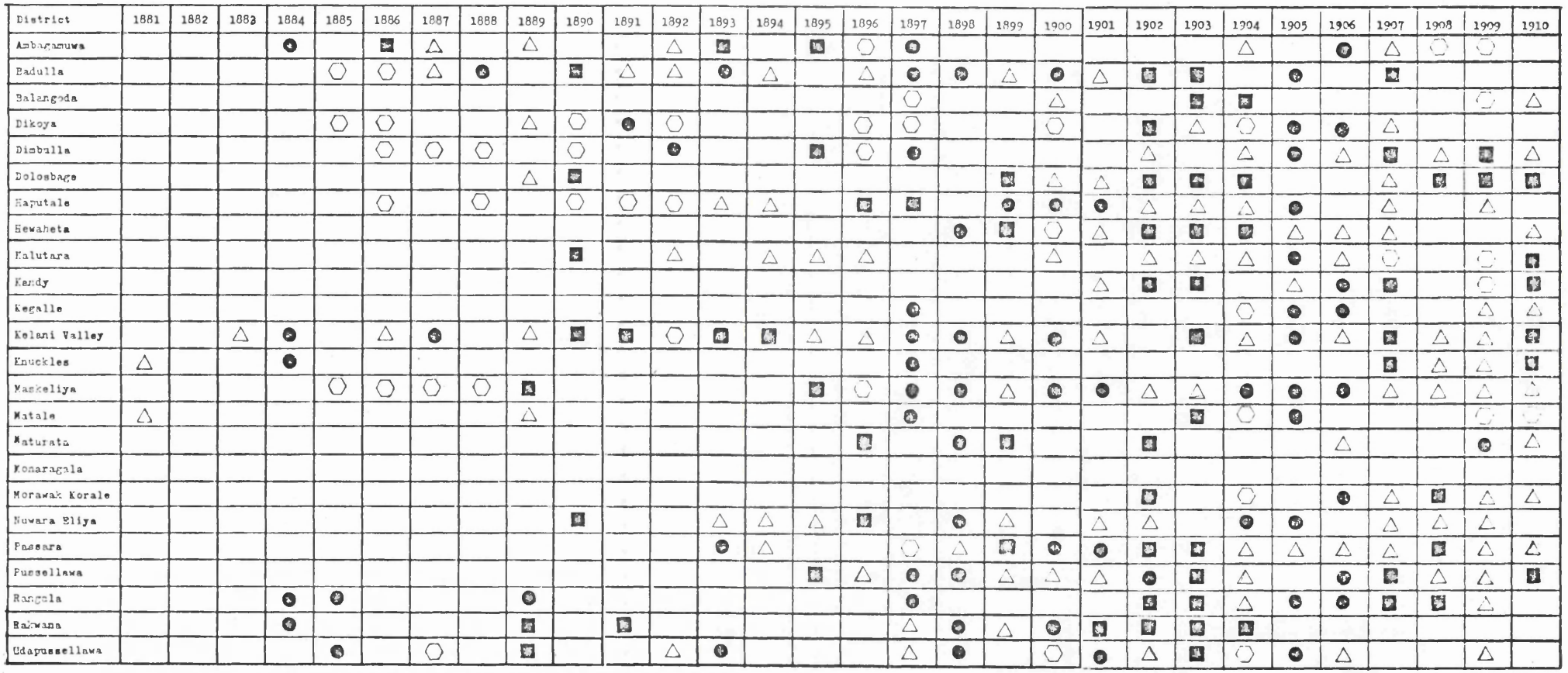
150. K. S. Sandhu, 1969, pp. 60-63.

of labour as well as in the years of labour shortage. But the adverse influence of the kangany and the Malayan recruiter was felt by the Ceylon planter in those years when good agricultural seasons occurred in South India and when it became relatively difficult to increase the inflow of labour at the average rates of advances offered by the Ceylon planter.

What the planters were trying to do was to maintain the static wage rates and also low rates of cash advances in a period of rapid expansion and prosperity of the plantation industry in the Island. Their main grievance was not so much the inadequacy of labour but the rising rates of advances to procure labour in adequate numbers. But the problem of rising rates of advances was largely confined to the years of good harvests in South India. The average rates which they held out were the rates capable of supplying an adequate supply of labour only in the years of agricultural distress in South India. In the years of good seasons these rates obviously proved inadequate to procure an adequate supply of labour. When such good agricultural years coincided with the years of prosperity in the plantation sector, when the planters could well afford to increase the demand price of labour, they succeeded in increasing the flow of labour by increasing the rate of advances. This happened for instance in the years 1895-6 and 1907-8. But when good agricultural years in South India coincided with the years when the planters were in economic difficulties and could ill afford to increase the rates of advances, they faced the problem of labour shortage in an acute form. But such coincidences were rare in our period. It occurred only once, in the years 1902-3--the worst years in the supply of labour to the plantations in the Island.

Figure 3.4 A district-wise study of the available qualitative data on the adequacy of the plantation labour supply, 1880-1910



Note:- The main sources for the above chart are the Annual Reports of the District Planters' Associations and the District Planting Notes published in MCO, CCO. These sources contain the most satisfactory qualitative evidence on the demand-supply situation of labour. The district-wise state of the labour market in each year is briefly described in these works.

- Where the supply of labour is described as 'plentiful', 'ample', 'abundant', or in excess of demand.
- Where the labour supply is described as 'adequate' or 'fair'.
- Where the labour supply is described as inadequate.
- Where the Annual Reports are available but mention nothing about labour problems.

CHAPTER IV

THE WAGE RATES AND THE GROSS EARNINGS

An attempt will be made in the present chapter to ascertain and explain the trends in the wage rates paid to the estate labourers in our period. On examining the available data on the wage rates, we find that the daily wage rates remained relatively unchanged throughout. The period, as we have seen already, witnessed sharp fluctuations in the demand and supply of labour. In the context of the labour market it seems puzzling how the planters succeeded in their attempt to maintain a static daily wage rate. The reasons were three-fold. We have already seen in chapter III that the point of competition among the planters for labour was not the daily wage rate offered to the labourers but the amount of cash advances offered to the labour recruiters. The present chapter offers two additional explanations for the prevalence of the static wage rates. On the one hand, the monthly wages of the labourers were calculated on the number of days the labourers worked; and the planters varied the number of work days offered to the labourers in the month according to the work-load on the estates. Thus, the demand for labour, in fact, affected the monthly income of the labourers. On the other hand, the planters claimed to have reconciled the labourers to the changes in the cost of living by arranging for the estate to supply the labourers with their staple food--rice--at a constant price irrespective of the price fluctuations in the market. In our analysis of the gross earnings, attempted in sections 2-3 in the present chapter, we will confine our attention to the adult male and female labourers in the tea plucking labour force. They formed the bulk of the estate labour force. Besides, the data on the earnings of the other sections of the estate labour force are scanty. At the end of section 3 we will look into the earnings of these other groups of workers. Finally, in section 4 we will analyse the system

by which the estates supplied rice to the labourers. Our immediate attention will be devoted in section 1 to the nature of the data available to us on the wage rates paid in our period.

1. The nature of the available wage data

The wage rates paid to the immigrant labourers in the period 1880-1910 are not available in any consistently recorded series maintained either by the Government or any other organisation. The Ceylon Government Blue Books of these years contain annual series of daily wage rates paid to the labourers of the different administrative districts.[1] But this information, given under three broad headings--viz., praedial, domestic, and trade--is not directly useful in estimating the earnings of the plantation labourers. The district wage rates given under the heading praedial were the average rates paid to all types of agricultural labourers in the district. A comparison of the Blue Book data and other available data on wage rates paid to the agricultural labourers in a particular year in two select districts--an up-country district and a low-country district--is attempted below.

TABLE 4.1 Variations in daily wage rates (in cents)

District	Information given by the planters on the daily rates paid to different categories of labour				Average rates recorded in Blue Book
	Sinhalese labour	Factory worker	Plucking man	Plucking woman	
Kalutara	25-50	40	33	.25	40-50
Kandy	N	37-40	33	25	50

Sources: Cey. Lab. Com. 1908, pp. 339, 403.
Cey. BB, 1908, p. v3.

N:- No information available

1. Cey. BB, (annual series, 1880-1910).

The wide variations in the rates paid to different types of labour in each districts, as seen in the above Table, obviously make it meaningless to depend on the Blue Book average rate for each district in ascertaining the earnings of the estate labourers. Instead, an effort will be made in the ensuing pages to find out the different rates of wages paid to the different types of plantation workers. This will have to be done by scrutinizing scattered information. The data given in the Blue Books, however, being the only available continuous series of annual wage rates, is useful in indicating the broad trends in the movement of wage rates in each district. But for a detailed and a realistic understanding of the plantation wage structure, evidence has to be sought elsewhere. The bulk of this information is found in the records maintained by the planters.

In 1878, the Ceylon Planters' Association initiated an attempt to collect information on the average daily wage rates prevailing in each planting district in the Island. These data were published by the Association. The relevant information was collected from the District Planters' Associations. But this method of collecting wage data seems to have been, unfortunately, discontinued in 1880. The available information for the years 1878-9 form a useful starting point for our study. In 1891, the Census Commissioner requested the Planters' Association to submit the prevailing wage rates in the planting districts together with those of the year 1881 by way of comparison. This information too was collected from the District Planters' Associations. In 1900, the Government of India raised the question of wage rates with the Government of Ceylon and requested information in this respect. The latter, on the authority of the Planters' Association, informed the Government of India about the average estate daily wage rates paid at the time. Towards the latter part of our period more data are available, for the Labour Commission appointed by the Government of Ceylon in 1907 gathered information on

the current wage rates from the witnesses who appeared before the Commission, most of whom were planters. Thus, all the information we have are from the planters' records.

Another limitation of the available information on wage rates is that they are neither systematic nor strictly comparable. The 1878-9 statistics are fairly comprehensive and cover most of the planting districts. Those of 1881 and 1891 cover only some of the more important planting districts. The 1900 information gives only the average all-Island immigrant plantation labour wage rates paid to the male and female workers, and there is no detailed information on the variations in wage rates paid in the different districts. The information available for the year 1908 was supplied by those individual planters who appeared before the Commission. These wage rates related to their individual estates. In the absence of an annual series of wage data, we are driven to make the best use of the information given in the above mentioned sources. All the possibly comparable data on the average wage rates available in these sources are given in Table 4.2.

The problem of the lack of a comprehensive series of wage data for the period from 1880 to 1910 seems to be minimized by two factors. First, the years for which the wage data are available fall into the five different stages which the planting industry of the Island underwent during our period. As seen earlier on, these five stages were the period of prosperity in the coffee industry during the 1870^{s}, the period of depression (1880-5), the decade of the tea mania (1886-97), the period of the slump in the tea industry (1898-1903), and the subsequent period of the revival of its prosperity (1904-10). The information for 1878-9 gives some idea about the wage rates during the last prosperous years of the coffee industry. The statistics of 1881 reveal the wage situation in the period of the depression during the early 1880^{s}. The years 1891 and 1900 respectively fall into the period of the tea mania and the subsequent

period of the first serious slump in the tea industry. The detailed information available for the year 1908 gives a comprehensive idea of the wage situation in the years which saw the renewed prosperity of the tea industry and the concurrent rapid spread of the rubber industry. Secondly, throughout the period from about 1880, the average regional daily wage rates in various planting districts appeared to have remained quite unchanged over long periods of time.[2] Statistically, this is clear from the information given in Table 4.2. The discussion in the following section on the trends of wage rates will firmly establish the conclusion that the daily wage rates remained quite unchanged throughout these years. Because of the constancy of the daily wage rates, the problem of the lack of an annual series of daily wage rates does not seriously handicap our study of the wage rates.

2. The trends in the daily wage rates, 1880-1910

Table 4.2 reveals that the daily wage rates during the late 1870^{s} varied between 33-37 cents for men and between 25-29 cents for women field workers. The majority of estates appear to have paid the higher of these two scale rates during the late 1870^{s}.[3] In the early 1880^{s}, these rates declined to 33 for men and 25 for women, and remained virtually static thereafter to the end of our period. An attempt will now be made in the following paragraphs, first, to analyse how the standard wage rates of 33 and 25 came into being in the early 1880^{s}, and secondly, to see why these rates underwent little change during the succeeding 30 years.

The decision of the planters to reduce the wage rates to 33 and 25 cents from the pre-depression rates was a direct result of the slump in the planting sector. With the depression in the coffee industry in the early 1880^{s} curtailment of estate expenditure became imperative. Hence

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2. Cey. Lab. Com. 1908, pp. 38, 378.

3. Quarterly District Reports for 1877, PPAC 1878, pp. 131-61.
Quarterly District Reports for 1878, ibid., 1879, pp. 1-78.

TABLE 4.2 Average daily wage rates paid to male and female field labourers in the different planting districts in Ceylon, 1878-1910 (in cents)

District	1878-9		1881		1891		1901	1908	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female		Male	Female
Ambegamuwa	33-37	29 29	32	25	32	25	Average earnings of male and female immigrant labourers were 33 and 25 cents per day respectively.	33	25
Badulla	33-37	29 29	35	25	37	29		35-37	25-29
Dolosbage	33	25	33	25	33	25			
Dikoya	37	27-29	33	25	33	25		33	25
Dimbulla	32-37	25-29	32-36	25-30	33	25		33	25
Maskeliya			33	25	33	25			
Haputale	35-40	25-29	37		37			33-37	
Kotmale	33-37	25-29						33	25
Matale	30-33	25						33	25
Udapussellawa	32-37	25						33	25
Yakdessa	33-37	25-29	33	25	33	25			
Rakwana	33-37	25-29						33-37	
Kalutara			30-33	20-25	30-33	20-25		32-33	25
Kelani Valley			30-33	20-25	30-33	20-25		33	25

Sources: Quarterly District Reports for 1877, PPAC 1878, pp. 131-161.
Quarterly District Reports for 1878, ibid., 1879, pp. 1-78.
Ibid., 1893, pp. lxxviii-lxxxiv.
Ibid., 1901, pp. clxxvii-clxxviii.
Cey. Lab. Com. 1908, Proceedings.

the planters, at the initiative of their Colombo Agents, decided on a general reduction of 10 per cent of the pre-1880 daily rates.[4] In the mechanism of wage fixation there was no place for negotiation between the employer and the employee. The rates were decided by the planters unilaterally, particularly at their District Planters' Associations.[5] One of the impelling motives of labour migration being the labourers' desire to return home with some cash savings, the planters had to offer rates which could ensure a margin over and above the cost of living of the labourers on the estates in Ceylon. It was imperative, therefore, for the planters to reckon the cost of living of the labourers in deciding on wage rates. They used the price of rice as a crude index of the cost of living of the labourers in fixing the daily wage rates.[6] Cost of rice covered nearly three-fourths of an average labourer's budget. In the early 1880s, the consensus of the planters' views was that a daily wage rate of 33 and 25 cents with the opportunity to work for 5 to 6 days per week was sufficient to ensure a reasonable saving for the labourers, provided rice was supplied to the labourers at Rs. 4 per bushel.

Table 4.2 reveals that the standard wage rates of 33 and 25 cents were not adopted by the planters of all planting districts in the Island. There were regional variations. The planting districts of Badulla, Rakwana, Haputale, and Pundaluoya paid a slightly higher rate varying between 33-37 for men and 25-29 cents for women. The adoption of the higher scale in these districts was largely due to the relatively higher cost of living

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4. 'Coast Advances and Coolies' pay', Circular of 18 tea exporting companies to all DPAs. WCO, 4 June 1880.
'Reduction of wages of the labourers', by a Proprietor, ibid., 3 June 1880.
Proceedings of the general meetings of the Maskeliya, Dikoya, Rakwana and Dimbulla DPAs published in ibid., 8, 12, 23, and 24 June 1880.

5. AnRs of Dimbulla, Rakwana, Maskeliya and Dikoya DPAs for 1880, published in ibid., 19 January 1881 and 1, 3, and 14 February 1881 respectively.
SCC, Proceedings, Cey. SP VI of 1894, p. c26.

6. See below, pp. 193ff.

and the relative inaccessibility of these districts.[7] These districts were situated at a higher elevation and away from the main network of rail and trunk-road communication in the Island. This had two effects. First, the labourers had to make a long and a tedious journey on foot to reach these estates. More significant, the food prices in districts such as Badulla and Rakwana were relatively high due to the higher cost of transport of commodities to these districts. The higher cost of living in these districts is seen in the regional variations in the price of rice given in section 4 of the present chapter. In order to compete for labour with the estates in the districts where rice and other food-stuffs were available at a lower price, the planters of the districts where the cost of living was relatively high, found it necessary to offer daily wage rates above that of the standard rates of 33 and 25 cents.[8]

On the other hand, at least until about 1904, the wage rates paid in the low-country planting districts of Kalutara and Kelani Valley were below the standard wage rate. In these districts the rates varied between 30-33 for men and 20-25 cents for women. The lower rates offered in the low country tea districts can be explained on two grounds. On the one hand, the quality of tea produced in the low-country districts was inferior to that produced in the up-country districts. Consequently, "low grown" tea fetched lower prices. On the other hand, the low-country planter was in a position to offer a greater number of days of work in the year than his counterpart in the up-country because the seasons of inclement weather dissuading field work was relatively narrow in the low-country regions.[9] This, to a point, helped to offset the disadvantages of the lower daily wage rates in these districts. Besides, in the period

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7. See below, pp. 201-204, 249.

8. A general meeting of Uva DPA, 3 June 1880, WCO., 30 June 1880. A general meeting of Udapussellawa DPA, 19 June 1880, ibid., 24 June 1880.

9. See below, pp. 181-183.

until about 1904, the demand for labour in the low-country districts was not heavy as in the up-country districts.

From 1904, however, the low-country planters of Kalutara and Kelani Valley began to raise their daily wage rates to the standard wage level of 33 and 25. This was mainly the outcome of the heavy demand for labour which took place in these districts with the rapid extension of rubber cultivation after 1904. This, together with the renewed prosperity of the tea industry brought about a period of intense competition for labour. Evidence reveal that the low-country planters were trying to induce the labourers in the up-country districts to migrate to their districts by the offer of high cash advances. In this competition for labour, the low-country planters found it necessary to raise their daily wage rates.

The above discussion on the daily wage rates reveal that in the period 1885-1910, periodic changes in wage rates occurred only in the low-country districts; and that even in these districts it was only an attempt to level up the rates to the standard ones. Otherwise, the wage rates decided on in the early 1880s remained quite unchanged. The period from 1880 to 1910 was one of important economic changes affecting the plantation labour market. On the one hand, there were upheavels in the fortunes of the planting sector.[10] On the other hand, in the years after 1889 there was an increase in the cost of living of the estate labourers.[11] In spite of these crucial economic developments, the low rates of wages fixed during the depression of the early 1880 persisted. This apparently remarkable uniformity of wage rates in an economic background of rising cost of living and renewed prosperity of the planting sector was largely due to the efforts made by the planters to avoid a rise in the wage rates.

The planters were able to achieve this due to three important factors. First, we have already seen in detail that the point of bargain

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10. See above, chap. III.
11. See below, pp. 207-210, 250-252.

between the employers and the kanganies was not the wage rate but the rate of advances. Secondly, with the growth of the tea industry after 1885 and the consequent increase in the volume of available work, the planters were able to offer a greater number of days of work per labourer per month than during the depression years of the early 1880s. As a result, the monthly gross earnings of the labourers increased though, in fact, the daily wage rates remained static. This increase in the gross earnings partly at least helped to counteract the effects of the rise in the cost of living of the labourers. Thirdly, the planters issued a weekly quota of rice to the labourers as part-payment of their wages at rates within fixed limits. This helped to offset the effects of any sharp fluctuation of the price of rice to the labourers when such fluctuations did occur. In the following sections of this chapter we will devote our attention to the last two factors mentioned above.

3. The monthly gross earnings of the estate labourers

The earnings of the labourers were calculated on a monthly basis according to the number of days they actually worked on the estate. The Labour Ordinance No. 13 of 1889 made it obligatory for the planter to pay his labourer six days' wages per week as long as the labourer was willing to work irrespective of whether there was work available on the estate or not.[12] The Ordinance was defective in that it did not embody a penalty for the violation of this provision. The above provision remained a dead-letter throughout the period of our study.[13] As before, even after the Ordinance, the monthly earnings of the labourers were calculated strictly on the number of days the labourers actually worked.

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12. An Ordinance amending the Law relating to Indian Immigrant Coolies employed on Ceylon Estates, A Revised Edition of the Legislative Enactments of Ceylon, 1923, Vol. I, p. 578.

13. Cey. Lab. Com. 1908, Proceedings, p. 14.

It is important to understand the internal arrangement followed in the estates to utilize labour to the best advantage of the estates at the least possible cost. We have seen that the standard daily wage rates of 33 and 25 cents were fixed at the time of the depression in the early 1880^{s} when the demand for labour was low and the planters were faced with financial difficulties. During the subsequent years of prosperity, the planters did not utilize the daily wage scale to attract labour. Instead, in times of high yield and consequent heavy demand for labour, the policy of the planters was to increase the number of work-days offered per labourer at the same standard daily wage rates, viz., 33 and 25 cents. During the times of low yield and the consequent slack demand for labour, the number of work-days offered to the labourers was curtailed. Thus, the gross monthly earnings of the labourers fluctuated though the daily wage rate remained static. This policy naturally meant that the cost of labour per pound of tea plucked remained almost unchanged both during periods of high and low yield in the tea estates. Such an arrangement was decidedly to the economic advantage of the planters because the rates paid by them during the period of relative prosperity in the years from 1886 to 1910 were, in fact, the rates fixed by them during the depression in the early 1880^{s}. And then, as we have already seen, these were rates which the planters actually reduced from the pre-depression wage level in order to curtail the working cost of the plantations. Thus, the labourers' income per unit of labour remained unchanged throughout the period 1880-1910 at the low rates fixed in the early 1880^{s}.

The method of calculating the monthly wage of the labourer on the actual number of days of work done by him makes it necessary for us to obtain detailed information on the latter point in order to know the trends of gross earnings of the labourers. There is no systematic data on the number of days of work performed by the labourers in the years from 1880 to 1910. Each planter maintained a record known as the

"estate Check-roll" on the turn up of labour at muster each morning. These daily records for our period are not available today. All available information is confined to the statements and evidence given by the planters as and when the question of the number of working days offered to the labourers was debated in public during these years. A scrutiny of this information leads us to acceptable conclusions on the average number of days of work offered to the labourers per month during each of the periods of depression (1880-5; 1898-1903) and prosperity (1886-97; 1904-10) in the planting sector in the Island in our period. This evidence has been made use of in the following pages in calculating the gross earnings of the labourers.

Clearly, three factors decided the number of work days available per labourer. First, the nature of the yield of coffee and later of tea was of primary importance. This was mainly influenced by the weather conditions. Secondly, the fortunes of the planting sector and their influence on the production policy of the planters naturally had their impact on the volume of work available per labourer. Thirdly, the available supply of labour had an important effect on the amount of work available per labourer. It is useful to note that in the planters' jargon the phrase "short work" denoted 3-4 days of work as against "full work" of 5-6 days per week.

In the coffee plantations, the crop was heavily seasonal. The picking of the coffee berries was confined to about four months of the year, particularly from about August to mid-November. During the rest of the months, the work in the coffee estates slackened and it was confined to mere maintenance of the estates. During these months, the planters were able to manage the estates with a comparatively small labour force and also offer work less frequently.

During the years of coffee prosperity when the planters maintained the estates at the maximum level of production, the labourers in the

coffee estates were able to obtain 5-6 work-days per week during the coffee picking season.[14] Thus, during these months, the monthly work-days of the labourers averaged approximately between 20 and 24. Available evidence suggests that this average was maintained in the years 1878-9.[15] During the off season, maintenance work was done mainly by men. Women failed to get even "short work" during this season of the year as their main employ was the picking of coffee berries. There is hardly any evidence on the number of days of work performed by the labourers during the slack season on the coffee estates.

During the period of the depression (1880-5), there is conclusive evidence that the planters followed a policy of "short work" by providing only 3 or 4 work-days per labourer in a week as against the pre-depression rate of 5 to 6 days.[16] This meant that the labourers managed to obtain work only for an average of 12-16 days per month. The decrease was obviously due to the decline in the volume of available work consequent on the economic catastrophe in the plantation sector. The depression also caused a substantial section of the labourers to return to their villages in South India. But even so, a considerable body still remained and the result was a state of surplus labour in the Island. It was this excess supply of labour which enabled the planters to pursue a policy of "short work". Such a policy would have been difficult under conditions of a scarcity of labour.

We have so far seen the work situation of the coffee plantations, particularly in the period 1878-85. The transition from coffee to tea brought about a significant change in the work situation in the plantation sector. Whereas the coffee crop was highly seasonal, the growth of the

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14. Sec. of PAC to "A Planter", 9 September 1869, PPAC 1870, Correspondence, p. 25.

15. Planting Notes from Central Province, The Overland Ceylon Observer, 23 January 1879.

16. Annual general meeting of PAC, 17 February 1880, PPAC 1881, p. 14. Gov. to S of S., No. 144 of 12 October 1883, C.O. 384/145. 'The Reduction of Estate Expenditure, No. 1', by M.P., WCO, 11 June 1880.

tea leaf was perennial. Thus, work was available in the tea plantations throughout the year. But the volume of work available per labourer fluctuated from time to time depending partly on the climatic conditions and the consequent seasonal fluctuations in the tea yield. There were months of high, ordinary, and low yield. Statistics on the monthly yield of tea is the best source of information to find out the extent of seasonal fluctuations of the work-load on the tea estates. But consistent statistical information on the monthly tea yield is lacking for our period.

However, there is overwhelming evidence that in Ceylon during the spring months of March to May, the growth of tea bushes was vigorous and the yield abundant. T. C. Owen and H. K. Rutherford, two leading contemporary writers on Ceylon tea who were also veteran tea planters in the Island at the time, distinctly agreed on this point.[17] The latter estimated that 21 per cent of the annual tea crop was made in April and May. Experience of those planters who gave evidence before the Labour Commission of 1908 clearly vindicated the above conclusion on the question of the monthly yield of tea.[18] During the spring months the tea yield depended on the relatively regular and reliable south-west monsoon.

The seasons of low yield due to bad weather underwent considerable periodic and regional fluctuations. Bad weather meant either prolonged drought which hindered the tea flush or heavy rains which dissuaded the labourers from turning up for field work and also often caused wash-aways and slips on the hilly slops where most of the up-country tea estates were. The evidence of the planters set out in column 5 in Table 4.3 reveals that interruption of work on the tea estates either by drought or by wet weather particularly affected the up and mid-country tea

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17. T. C. Owen, 1886, pp. xxiii, 4.
H. K. Rutherford, 1889, p. 29.
On seasonal fluctuations in the yield, see also, 'Results of the Mariawatte Estate up to end of 1884, WCO, 19 January 1885.

18. Cey. Lab. Com. 1908, Proceedings, pp. 59, 490.
Ibid., Appendix HH, H. G. Bois to Sec. of Labour Commission, 8 June 1908, p. 643.

TABLE 4.3 Showing the work situation on the tea estates during months of heavy and ordinary yield, and also during months of bad weather, 1907-8.

Planting district (1)	Average No. of days laborers worked per month (2)	No. of work days required for rice issue in season of ordinary yield (3)	No. of work days required for rice issue in season of heavy yield (4)	Available information on season of short work (5)
Badulla	20-22	N	24	In very dry times in August & September 4-5 days per week.
Haputale	20	22	N	In dry weather in August & September 4 or 5 days per week.
Pundaluoya	20-22	20-22	N	N
Rakwana	22	N	N	Short work during south-west winds.
Ambegamuwa	20-22	20-22	24	Short work in July-August due to bad weather.
Maturata	22	20	N	Short work in monsoon after June.
Kandy	20	20	N	Short time of short work.
Dimbulla	20-22	20	24	In dry times in March & in the burst of monsoon in June & July 4 or 5 days per week.
Dikoya	20	20	24	In June & July not more than 4 days per week due to wet weather.
Nilambe	N	N	24	N
Maskeliya	22	20	N	In monsoon months 4 days per week.
Talawakele	22	22	N	Short work in weeks of bad weather.
Pussellawa	N	N	N	4 or 5 days per week in July-September.
Knuckles	20	N	22	Short work in monsoon after June.
Dolosbage	22	22	N	4 days per week in 4 weeks of dry weather in the year.
Lower Dikoya	20	N	N	Short work in inclement weather.
Gampola	20	N	24	Short work in poor plucking months.
Kalutara	22-24	22-24	N	Never short work.
Kelani Valley	22	N	N	Never short work.

Source: Cey. Lab. Com. 1908, Proceedings.

N:- No information available.

estates in the Central and Uva Provinces. In the planting districts of the relatively low elevation in the Sabaragamuwa and Western Provinces, bad weather was not as harsh as in the Central and Uva Provinces so as to impede estate work. The planters of Sabaragamuwa and Western Provinces who gave evidence before the Labour Commission in 1908 were unanimous that they never had "short work" during any time of the year.[19] Some of the up-country planters confirmed this view. In contrast, in the Central and Uva Provinces,"short work" was unavoidable during several months of the year.[20] However, unfavourable weather affected the different planting districts during different months of the year. Therefore, it is not possible to categorise particular months in the year as bad weather months common to the planting region. According to the detailed evidence available for 1907-8, it appears that whereas in the Badulla district "short work" due to bad weather usually occurred in August and September, in the planting districts of Dimbulla and Dikoya "short work" was unavoidable during the burst of the south-west monsoon in June and July. On the other hand, in Pussellawa "short work" due to heavy rains usually lasted from July to September. The most acceptable conclusion is that the up and mid-country planting districts experienced unfavourable weather during an average of two to three months in the year and during these months "short work" was unavoidable on the tea estates.

Thus, the following conclusions could be reached on the working of the tea estates. Heavy yield of tea took place in all the planting districts during the months of March, April, and May. Secondly, due to inclement weather, the up-country planting districts found it difficult to avoid "short work" for periods ranging from two to three months in the year. Thirdly, the rest of the year witnessed ordinary yield of tea.

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19. Ibid., Report, p. xvi.
Ibid., Proceedings, pp. 350, 355, 364, 375.

20. Ibid., pp. 11, 152, 182, 300, 411.
Ibid., Report, p. xvi.

Fourthly, since bad weather was not so common in the low-country planting districts as to impede work on estates, the planters in these districts found it possible to avoid "short work" occurring virtually at any time of the year.

Details regarding the number of work-days offered to the labourers during the three different seasons have been recorded by the Labour Commission of 1908 from the planters who gave evidence. This information gives us a reasonably good idea on the working of the tea plantation sector. Therefore, we will now examine this body of evidence available for the years 1907-8 and thereafter attempt a chronological analysis of the average number of monthly work-days offered to the labourers in the period 1886-1910. The information available for 1908 is set out in Table 4.3. The statistics in columns 3 and 4 on the number of days of work which the planters required of their labourers for the latter to be eligible for the weekly quota of rice issued by the planters is a useful source of information to verify the planters' evidence on the number of work-days performed by the labourers as set out in column 2. It was a long established custom in all planting districts of the Island for the planters to provide the estate labourers with a monthly quota of rice. The planters as a rule required the labourers to turn up for a certain number of days for work per week before they were eligible for their quota. Where the number of days the labourers turned up for work fell short of the required number, the quantity of rice issued by the estate was proportionately curtailed.[21] From the point of view of the planters, this limit could be regarded as the average number of days of work which they expected from the labourers during each week. In times of heavy work-load or scarcity of labour on the estates the number of days a labourer had to work to be eligible for the full quota of rice was raised

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21. Supreme Court, Colville Vs Ramasami Kangani, The Overland Ceylon Observer, 24 June 1879.
K. Thiargaraja, 1917, p. 181.

while in times of low yield when the demand for labour was light the limit was relaxed. Thus, during the high yielding months of March to May the planters demanded either 6 days of work each week or 5 and 6 days in alternate weeks; that is a total of 11 days a fortnight. In the months of ordinary yield the usual number of days of work required of the labourers was 5 per week. In the months of low yield, this limit was not strictly adhered to by the planters. For the labourers, the supply of the weekly quota of rice was one of the major attractions of employment on the estates in Ceylon.[22] It effectively encouraged the labourers to work the stipulated number of days per week in order to obtain the full quota of rice. Thus, the limits imposed for the issue of the full quota of rice could reasonably be taken as indicating the standard number of days the labourers usually strove to turn up for work.

On the basis of the information in columns 2 and 3, it is possible to conclude that during the months of ordinary yield, the average number of days the labourers worked was either 5 per week or 5 and 6 in alternate weeks; that is an average fluctuating between 20 and 22 days per month. During the months of heavy yield, it appears from column 4 that the number of work-days increased to an average of 22 to 24. Column 5 reveals that during the months of unfavourable weather when the crop was low and the work on tea estates was slack, the average number of working days dwindled to an average of 16 to 18 per month.

As indicated earlier on, the above conclusions are based on the evidence available for the years 1907-8 and are strictly valid for these two years. The overall policy of the planters then was to maintain the estates at the maximum level of production. 1907-8 were also years of a relative labour shortage. Such conditions did not prevail in the tea planting sector all throughout our period. It is necessary, therefore, for us to make a chronological analysis of the variations in the number of

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22. See below, pp. 213-215.

work-days offered to the estate workers in the period 1886-1910.

During 1886-97 not only did the tea planters maintain the tea acreage in yield at the maximum level of production but they also annually brought new land under cultivation. This state of the tea industry enabled the planters to offer their labourers with "full work" not only during the months of high yield but also during the months of ordinary yield as alternative work was now found for the labourers in the opening up of new land for tea. It was only when inclement weather precluded regular field work that "full work" was not possible, and the monthly average number of days of work declined to 16-18. Since unfavourable weather did not seriously hinder the working of the low-country tea estates, the planters of these districts were able to offer "full work" of 22 to 24 days per month throughout the year during the period from 1886 to 1897.

This situation changed in the years 1898-1901. Available evidence suggests that the volume of work per labourer declined in these years. The slump in the tea industry virtually put an end to the earlier policy of heavy production and also to the further opening up of new land for tea cultivation. In an effort to curtail production cost all extra work on tea estates such as manuring and weeding was reduced. The consequent drop in the volume of work in the years 1898-1901 took place in a context of an over-supply of labour. Experience of several planters reveals that the supply of labour in excess of the slumped demand in the estates in the years 1898-1901 resulted in a state of "short work".[23] They were quite out-spoken in stating that short and irregular shifts were widely practised in the planting districts. T. N. Christie, a leading planter and one time representative of the planting interests in the Legislative Council wrote that, "It might be that, owing to periods of short flush and rather too large a labour supply ... too short work had been given."[24]

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23. Editorial, COO, 6 February 1899.
Report of the Special Committee on the Labour Question, Memoranda Re. Labour Question, PPAC 1903-1904, pp. 3-14.

24. Annual General meeting of PAC, 17 February 1904, ibid., p. 71.

While there is conclusive evidence that "short work" was widespread in the years 1898-1901, there is some evidence which suggests that a relatively higher average of five work-days per week or 4 and 5 days in alternate weeks were offered to the labourers during some months of the year.[25] In the context of the slump and the overall surplus labour situation of these years the only meaningful conclusion one could reach is that the higher averages of 18 to 20 work-days per month were offered during the high yielding months of March to May each year during 1898-1901. During the rest of the months the "short work" rate averaging 12-16 work-days was general in the planting districts.

Though the slump in the tea industry continued in the years 1902-3, the widespread shortage of labour felt throughout the planting districts during these two years induced the planters to offer "full work" especially during the spring months.[26]

The period 1904-10 witnessed an upward trend in the volume of work available in the planting sector. The revival of remunerative tea prices after 1903 encouraged the employers to maintain the tea plantations in yield at a high rate of production. In the up and mid-country districts, there was little opening up of new land for cultivation such as took place during 1886-97. The work on the estates was mainly confined to the process of production of tea. The planters, therefore, found it difficult to maintain the "full work" rate except during the months of high yield. This meant that during the months of ordinary yield during these years the labourers obtained only an average of 19-21 work-days. During the months of bad weather, the average dwindled to the "short work" rate of 16-18 days. In the low-country districts, the tea planters were able to offer "full work" of 22-24 days throughout the year partly because

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25. Cey. Lab. Com. 1908, Proceedings, pp. 483, 500-501.

26. Editorial, COM, 5 September 1902.
'The Labour Question II', by Yellantharie Dorie, ibid., 19 December 1902.

inclement weather was not so critical as to hinder field work in the low-country and also because the large-scale opening up of new land for rubber in these districts provided alternative opportunities for work.

The conclusions reached in the preceding pages on the periodic and seasonal variations in the average number of work-days available in the planting districts in the period 1880-1910 are given in Table 4. 4 below.

TABLE 4.4 The average number of days of work performed by the labourers per month, 1880-1910.

Period	Up and mid-country districts	Low-country districts
1880-5		
In months of coffee yield	12-16	12-16
1886-97		
(a) In months of high and ordinary yield	22-24	Throughout year 22-24
(b) In months of bad weather (2-3 months)	16-18	
1898-1901		
(a) In months of high yield (March-May)	18-20	18-20
(b) During the rest of the year (9 months)	12-16	12-16
1902-10		
(a) In months of high yield (March-May)	22-24	Throughout year 22-24
(b) In months of ordinary yield	19-21	
(c) In months of bad weather (2-3 months)	16-18	

Evidence reveals that in the months of high yield during the years 1907-10 when there was a relative shortage of labour, the tea planters of virtually all the planting districts failed to get the work-load in their estates completed even at the "full work" rate of 22-24 days per month.[27] In order to get the estate work completed the tea planters adopted a policy of offering incentives to encourage the labourers to perform extra work in the months of peak work load in addition to the usual number of work-days offered to them.

The type of incentives offered to the labourers differed from estate to estate depending largely on the way each planter thought how best the extra volume of work on his estate could be completed. The most widespread types of incentives were as follows.[28] "Cash payments", which were settled at the end of the day, were offered to the labourers who worked on Sundays. Secondly, a bonus was given to the labourers who turned up for work up to six days per week. Thirdly, when a labourer worked for more than a certain number of days per month specified by the employer, the labourer was given an extra day's pay. Usually, this number of days ranged between 24 and 26 depending on the pressure of work on the estate. Fourthly, "cash payments" were given when labourers worked overtime at the end of the normal day's work which usually lasted from 6 in the morning to 4 in the afternoon, or when they plucked more than a specified number of pounds of leaf. Usually, this number varied between 16 and 30 pounds per labourer depending on the extent and the urgency of the available work.

It is extremely difficult to calculate the effect of the earnings from these incentives on the gross earnings of the labourers. It was not a regular source of income for the labourers throughout the year. The incentives for extra work were offered by the planters only during the

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27. Cey. Lab. Com. 1908, Proceedings, p. 769.

28. Ibid., evidence of all planting witnesses.
About 90 per cent of the planters who appeared before the Commission stated that they offered incentives.

season of heavy tea yield or in times of acute scarcity of labour. Besides, the amount of wages held out for the different types of incentives varied widely. Not only did the amount so held out vary from estate to estate, there were variations even on the same estate from time to time depending on the ratio of the available volume of work to the available force of labour on the estate. For instance, a planter who offered 1½ cents for every pound of tea leaf plucked by his labourers in excess of a stipulated limit would offer 2 cents the following week; or a planter who offered an extra pay of 50 cents for the worker who turned up 6 days in one week would offer one rupee in the next week. These wide and frequent variations made the working of the system of incentives extremely complex and not easily amenable to systematic study, particularly in its bearing on the gross earnings of the labourers. In Table 4.5 an attempt has been made to present the average rates of pay offered for extra work. It will give some idea about the available opportunities for extra work and the amount a labourer could possibly earn to supplement his regular monthly earnings.

TABLE 4.5 Types of incentives offered and the amounts paid to the labourers for overtime work, 1905-10.

Type of incentive	Average rate of payment
Sunday work	75 cents
For plucking over a stipulated limit of pounds in weight (this limit varied between 16 to 30 pounds)	1½ to 2½ cents per pound
For working 6 days	50 cents to Re.1
For working in excess of a stipulated number of days each month (usually varied between 24-26 days)	33 cents to Re.1

Source: Cey. Lab. Com. 1908, Proceedings.

There are several contemporary estimates made by the planters on the average supplementary earnings of their labourers from extra work.

According to these estimates a labourer's monthly income from the incentives seems to have varied between Rs.2 and Rs.2.50.[29] These estimates have been adopted in computing Table 4.6 giving the total earnings of the labourers from their regular monthly income as well as their earnings from the incentives.

In Table 4.6 an attempt has been made to present the periodic and seasonal variations in the gross monthly earnings of the immigrant plantation labourers in Ceylon in the period from 1880 to 1910 on the basis of the daily wage rates given in Table 4.2 and the number of days of work performed by the labourers as given in Table 4.3. In doing so, the planting districts are divided into three sub-divisions. First, there were the up-country districts such as Badulla, Haputale, and Pundaluoya where relatively higher daily wage rates of 35-37 cents and 25-29 cents were paid to the male and female labourers respectively. Secondly, there were the mid-country districts which paid the standard rates of 33 and 25 cents. Both these groups of districts had in common the problem of "short work" during some months in the year. But the gross monthly wages of the labourers were different in these two groups because of the variations in the daily wage rates. Thirdly, there were the low-country districts of Kelani Valley, Kalutara, and Ratnapura which paid wage rates similar to the districts situated at medium elevation but differed from the up and mid-country districts in being able to avoid "short work" the year round.

It should be emphasised that these findings on the gross monthly earnings of the labourers as set out in Table 4.6 are only the average limits within which the monthly income of the labourers fluctuated. In a context where, on the one hand, the workers were considered day labourers in the calculation of their wages, and on the other hand, the number of work-days fluctuated depending on the agricultural season, an accurate

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29. Cey. Lab. Com. 1908, Proceedings, p. 155.

TABLE 4.6 The average gross monthly earnings of the immigrant plantation labourers in Ceylon, 1880-1910.

Period	Up-country districts		Mid-country districts		Low-country districts	
	men	women	men	women	men	women
1880-5						
For 12-16 work-days	4.20-5.60	3.00-4.00	3.95-5.30	3.00-4.00	3.60-5.30	2.40-4.00
1886-97						
(a) In months of high and ordinary yield (22-24 work-days)	7.25-8.90	5.50-6.95	7.25-7.90	5.50-6.00	6.60-7.90 (through out the year)	4.40-6.00
(b) In 2-3 months of bad weather (16-18 work-days)	5.30-6.65	4.00-5.20	5.30-5.95	4.00-4.50		
1898-1901						
(a) In months of high yield (March-May; 18-20 work-days)	5.95-7.40	4.50-5.80	5.95-6.60	4.50-5.00	5.40-5.95	3.60-5.00
(b) Rest of the months (12-16 work-days)	3.95-5.30	3.00-4.65	3.95-5.90	3.00-4.00	3.60-5.30	2.40-4.00
1902-6						
(a) In months of high yield (March-May; 22-24 work-days)	7.25-8.90	5.50-6.95	7.25-7.90	5.50-6.00	7.25-7.90	5.50-6.00
(b) In months of ordinary yield (19-21 days)	6.25-7.75	4.55-6.10	6.25-6.90	4.55-5.25		
(c) In 2-3 months of bad weather (16-18 work-days)	5.30-6.65	4.00-5.20	5.30-5.95	4.00-4.50		
1907-1910						
(a) In months of high yield (March-May; 22-24 work-days) with overtime wages	9.25-11.35	7.50-9.45	9.25-10.40	7.50-8.50	9.25-10.40	7.50-8.50
(b) In months of ordinary yield (19-21 work-days)	6.25-7.75	4.55-6.10	6.25-6.90	4.55-5.25	7.25-7.90 (throughout the rest of the year)	5.50-6.00
(c) In 2-3 months of bad weather (16-18 work-days)	5.30-6.65	4.00-5.20	5.30-5.95	4.00-4.50		

calculation is difficult. The lack of detailed information makes such a calculation impossible. The annual change in the weather, for example, a delay in the south-west monsoon, would affect the yield and eventually the prospective earnings of the labourers. However, on the basis of the available data, the only reasonably acceptable conclusions we could reach on the gross earnings of the labourers are those that are set out in Table 4.6.

Besides tea plucking labour gangs there were other categories of estate workers. Among these were two groups of skilled workers--the factory worker and the prunner. The factory workers who did the work of transforming the green tea leaf into the final consumer article received the highest daily wage rates. They were paid rates varying between 37 and 45 cents per day.[30] Tea bushes had to be prunned periodically to maintain them at a certain height to enable the plucking of tea leaf. Besides, prunning encouraged heavy flushing of tea bushes. The work of prunning required a certain degree of skill in order to avoid the bushes getting harmed in the process of prunning. The prunner's wage ranged between 35-37 cents per day.[31] Child-labour was also utilized by the estates particularly in the work of weeding and also in tea plucking during the season of peak work-load. The daily wage rates paid for child-labour varied between 18 to 22 cents.[32] Finally, there was a category of labour known as contract-labour. While the contract-labour gangs were also organised by the kanganies, such gangs were not directly and regularly in the employ of the estates in that they were not included in the estate Check-rolls. They worked for estates by contract to complete a stipulated piece of work and were paid on a piece-work basis. The contract-labour gangs were usually employed for work such as clearing land, weeding, manuring, and draining.[33]

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30. Ibid., pp. 73, 201, 307, 650.
31. Ibid., pp. 181, 191, 294, 475.
32. Ibid., pp. 9, 26, 201, 485.
33. Ibid., Report, p. viii.

4. The price of rice issued to the labourers

We have seen so far that in the years 1880-1910 the daily wage rates paid to the plantation labourers remained unchanged and that the periodic and seasonal change in the demand and supply of labour found its expression in the rates of advances and the rates of monthly wages. Another aspect needs to be examined, viz., the planters' claim that the fluctuations of the daily wage rates were avoided by making use of the mechanism of the issue of rice to the labourers by the estates.

The following excerpts from two contemporary documents reveal the policy as expounded by the planting community. In 1884, the sub-committee of the Ceylon Chamber of Commerce appointed to consider the draft Labour Ordinance of that year pointed out that,

> From the first introduction of the immigrant labour in the colony it has been the practice to avoid as far as possible any variation in the rates of wages paid to the labourers, the compensation rendered necessary by varying circumstances being by agreement effected directly in the supply of rice.34

A planter giving evidence before the Ceylon Silver Currency Commission of 1893 described the system thus,

> When the prices(of rice) advance above what the cooly can afford to pay out of the usual wages, the planter issues rice at a fixed price, recouping himself by maintaining it for a time when the market price recedes. By this method fluctuations in the rates of wages are avoided.35

Thus, it was an important feature of the plantation labour system that the planters tried to adjust wages by giving rice in part-payment of wages at a fixed price irrespective of the cost.

Why did the planters pursue a policy of part-payment of wages in rice in preference to the payment of the gross wages in cash?. Historically, by the beginning of our period, the system was well developed.

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34. WCO, 16 January 1884.

35. SCC, Written Answers, Cey. SP VI of 1894, p. c23.
See also, ibid., p. c26.
'The Coolies' pay Legislation', by A. M. W, WCO, 4 January 1884.
Editorial, COO, 29 May 1890.

It had been evolved by the coffee planters of the mid-nineteenth century who found several advantages in this method of wage payment. The average coffee planter was a proprietor planter and he frequently faced the problem of obtaining working capital to finance the production of coffee. In this context, he tried to postpone as much of his immediate financial commitments as possible until his earnings actually reached him. The part-payment of wages in rice turned out to be one way of accomplishing this objective. The coffee planter found in the rice merchant, who was usually a Chetty, a source from which he could obtain the labourers' requirements of rice on credit to be repaid after he received his earnings from coffee.[36] Apart from the rice trade, the Chetty played an important role in the monetary market of the day. In the context of the mid-nineteenth century Ceylon where the specie in circulation was relatively sparse and banking facilities in the plantation districts were sporadic, the Chetty played the role of the credit banker. It was from him that most of the coffee planters cashed their cheques to obtain specie to pay the labourers' wages and also contracted occasional petty loans to tide over difficulties.[37] It was, therefore, found convenient and advantageous that the same Chetty should supply rice to the estate on credit.[38] On the part of the Chetty trader-moneylender community, issuing of commodities as well as money to their customers on credit was a major strategy in their trading modus operandi. It helped them to keep their customers tied to them and also eliminate any possible rivals who may not have the same financial resources and trading connections to sustain a policy of trading on credit for a long time as the Chetties did. The Chetties with their organised network of trading and moneylending links among the members of

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36. District Court, Kandy, Case No. 1210, Kumarappa Chetty Vs Tawalantenna Estate, COO, 7 February 1889.

37. Editorial, WCO, 19 February 1883.
District Court, Kandy, V.P.R. Paruvien Chetty Vs T. J. Grigg, ibid., 9 February 1885.
Appeal Court, T. R. Walker Vs Moorman boutique-keeper, COU, 13 February 1902.

38. Planting Notes from Talawakelle, COO, 6 January 1893.
General meeting of Morawakkorale DPA 30 July 1907, COU, 9 September 1902.

their community in India and Ceylon were in a position to operate their trading activities on a credit basis. However, the tea and the rubber planters of our period had greater access to working capital than their predecessors in the coffee period and were therefore less dependent on the Chetty for credit transactions. But the system of part-payment of wages in rice held out other advantages common to coffee planters of the mid-nineteenth century as well as the tea and rubber planters of our period. These advantages explain why the tea and the rubber planters continued the system.

First, the system was liked by the labourers. On the one hand, the South Indian labourers were long accustomed to the system of wage payment in kind in their own country.[39] On the other hand, the system as practised in the estates in Ceylon turned out to be beneficial to them. These benefits to the labourers together with the way the rice issue on the estates was organised helped the planters to obtain a steady turn-out of the labour force to work.[40]

Secondly, the planters were obviously keen in maintaining the low wage rates paid to their labourers. For the low wage rates to be feasible, rice had to be made available to the labourers at a certain price. A heavy increase in the market price of rice was inevitable to react on the wage rates if the labourers' were left to purchase their supplies in the open market. Therefore, if the planters' cost of production was to be kept down with a low wage bill without at the same time jeorpadizing the supply of labour, the labourers' requirements of rice had to be supplied to them at a mutually acceptable rate.

The above stated factor leads us to the third important factor, namely, the nature of the import and the retail trade of rice in the Island. The import of rice as well as the retail trade in the plantation

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39. LRSRMP for 1906, MERP, Vol. 7446, Pro. No. 490 of 31 December 1906.
40. See below, pp. 212-216.

districts were monopolised by the Chetties.[41] The payment of labourers' total wages in cash would have left them to purchase their requirements of rice from the local rice merchants. The bargaining position of the labourer vis-a-vis the rice merchant was a very weak one. But the planters, organised and articulate as they were, were obviously in a stronger bargaining position vis-a-vis the rice monopoly of the Chetty. Therefore, the employers directly confronted the rice merchant to ensure a cheap supply of rice to the ill-organised, inarticulate, and semi-literate labour force who would have otherwise easily succumbed to the monopolistic power of the Chetty rice dealer.

The alternative was to break up the rice monopoly either by the planters themselves entering the rice import trade or by European commercial firms doing so. But there were strong obstacles to this alternative. The Chetty rice monopoly was closely interwoven with the plantation labourers' decided preference for those varieties of rice produced in India.[42] They had been used to Indian rice in their own country. More important, the par-boiled Indian rice was found easy to cook and also it was possible to keep the cooked rice overnight for consumption next morning without going stale.[43] This was important in the context where the labourers' working day started at six in the morning and where the labourers were accustomed to have in the morning a heavy meal of rice prepared the night before.[44] They disliked the variety of rice produced in Ceylon. In any case, the total quantity of rice produced in the Island was not sufficient to meet even the demand of the indigenous population let alone the immigrant estate population. Burma

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41. 'Cooly Advances and Labour Supply', by Old Planter, COO, 7 June 1895. Editorial, COM, 25 April 1907.
'The Labour Question and the Price of Rice', speech by the Governor, ibid., 26 February 1908.

42. SCC, Minutes of Evidence, Cey. SP VI of 1894, pp. b6, c12.
Editorials of COM, 6 February 1900 and 14 March 1908.

43. 'The High Price of Rice', ibid., 25 April 1907.

44. See below, pp. 267-268.

presented an alternative source of rice. But Burma rice was not par-boiled. It entered the market as raw rice and was therefore not acceptable to the plantation labourers.[45] There were, in fact, several attempts during our period to obtain rice for Ceylon from Burma. But these attempts did not meet with great success.[46] One important reason for this outcome was that Burma rice could not successfully compete in Ceylon with Indian rice at the normal range of prices of Indian rice. Additional cost of par-boiling on top of higher transport costs from Burma to Ceylon inevitably augmented the price of Burma rice. It was only when the price of Indian rice reached an abnormally high level that Burma rice found it possible to enter the Ceylon market.[47] In our period, it was not common for Indian rice to reach such abnormally high price so as to render the purchase of Burma rice feasible. Even when attempts were made by the planters to experiment with the issue of Burma rice to their labour force in years when the price of Indian rice was abnormally high, the Chetties succeeded in thwarting such isolated efforts. The local Chetty merchants took advantage of the labourers' innate dislike to Burma rice and encouraged them to press their complaints.[48] The Chetty trader had to be listened to, for as we will show later on, the kanganies and the labourers were in debt to the local Chetty merchant for loans raised by the kanganies and also for provision obtained by the labourers. Besides, when rivals appeared on the scene, the Chetties combined themselves to undersell the rivals and thereby eliminate them. The Chetties had virtually entrenched themselves at the point of supply of rice in India as well as the point of demand among the consumers in the estates in the Island. In 1908, when the price of rice in Ceylon became abnormally high, Governor

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45. Editorial, COM, 14 March 1908.
46. Ibid.
47. Ibid.
48. Editorial, COM, 6 February 1900.

Sir Henry Blake described the Chetty rice monopoly as one

> ... in the hands of a ring existing between the blade of paddy and the consumer of rice. It comes from the field in Bengal and extends through the Chetty who has given advances in the field to the Chetty who brings it to Colombo, rigs the market, and sells it at his own price...49

In order to find out the working of the system of part-payment of the wages in rice in the estates it is necessary for us to know two sets of prices, viz., the price at which the estates purchased rice and the price at which rice was issued to the labourers. But available information on these two sets of prices are scattered. The only available series of rice prices are those pertaining to the rice market in Colombo. With the help of this series and the scattered information on the planters' cost price of rice an attempt will be made at the outset to prepare an annual Table on the approximate rates which the estates paid in purchasing rice. It is hoped to do this by taking the Colombo market price as the base and compute the planters' cost price of rice by adding to the Colombo price a sum to cover, first, the cost of transport from Colombo to the planting districts and also, secondly, a margin of profit to the trader who supplied rice to the estates.

This method of calculating the probable estate cost price of rice is acceptable on two grounds. First, this was the method adopted by the District Planters' Associations whenever these Associations fixed the maximum price payable by the planters of the respective districts.[50] Secondly, the Colombo market price series was prepared by the Ceylon Chamber of Commerce and published in The Weekly Ceylon Observer as a weekly guide to the planters in their purchase of rice.[51] Evidence reveals

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49. 'The Labour Question and the Price of Rice', speech by the Governor, ibid., 26 February 1908.

50. A general meeting of Dimbulla DPA, 8 September 1882, WCC, 14 September 1882.
AnR of Rakwana DPA for 1898, COO, 28 January 1899.
AnR of Rakwana DPA for 1901, COO, 30 January 1902.

51. The Weekly Ceylon Observer (1880-6) later changed its name to The Ceylon Observer, Overland Edition (1886-99) and The Ceylon Observer, Weekly Edition (1899-1910).

that individual planters did make use of The Weekly Ceylon Observer price list of rice in purchasing their supplies.[52] While some planters obtained their supplies of rice direct from Colombo, the majority of planters appear to have purchased rice from the local Chetty merchant.[53] When the local Chetties demanded exorbitant prices, the planters turned to the Colombo rice market.[54] This reaction of the planters reveals that even when purchasing rice from the local Chetty, the planters were guided by the Colombo price. Of the several varieties of Indian rice imported to the Island, the varieties most widely consumed by the estate population were Soolye and Callunda.[55] We will, therefore, confine our calculations of the market price to Soolye and Callunda rice alone. The annual average price of these two varieties of rice in the Colombo market is set out in column 1 of Table 4.7.

On the basis of the Colombo prices, we now hope to find out the approximate average prices paid by the planters of the different planting districts to purchase their supplies of rice. The regional differences in the price depended partly on the distance of the estates from Colombo and the available transport facilities. Rice was transported to the interior of the Island mainly by rail and cart. In some low country districts where there were rivers, rice was transported by ferries. In areas where these facilities were not available rice had to be carried to

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52. 'Monthly Average Price of Rice', by A. A. B, CCO, 3 February 1894.
'Planters and the Topic of the Day', by PRO BONO PUBLICO, COW, 13 February 1900.

53. District Court, Kandy, A. Forsythe Vs G & W. Leechman, The Ceylon Overland Observer, 10 June 1879.
A general meeting of the Dimbulla DPA, 8 September 1882, WCO, 14 September 1882.

54. A general meeting of the Maskeliya DPA, 23 August 1882, ibid., 28 August 1882.
AnR of Rakwana DPA for 1898, CCO, 28 January 1899.

55. 'Tenders for Victualling Immigrant Coolies', by G. A. W.P., CGG, October-December 1905, pt. I, p. 1056.
Editorial, CCW, 25 April 1907.

TABLE 4.7 Showing the Colombo market price of rice together with the average cost price price to the planters and the average price charged to the labourers in the estates situated at low, medium, and high elevation, 1880-1910 (in rupees and cents per bushel)

Profit or loss to the estates	Year (1)	Colombo market price (2)	Low elevation		Mid elevation		High elevation	
			Cost price to estates (3)	Price to labourers (4)	Cost price to estates (5)	Price to labourers (6)	Cost price to estates (7)	Price to labourers (8)
	1880	2.85	3.10	3.60	3.35	4.00	3.75	4.50
	1881	2.85	3.10	3.60	3.35	4.00	3.75	4.50
	1882	2.55	2.80	3.60	3.05	4.00	3.45	4.50
	1883	2.45	2.70	3.60	2.95	4.00	3.35	4.50
	1884	2.70	2.90	3.60	3.20	4.00	3.60	4.50
	1885	3.15	3.40	3.60	3.65	4.00	4.05	4.50
Profit	1886	2.75	3.00	3.60	3.25	4.00	3.65	4.50
	1887	2.80	3.05	3.60	3.30	4.00	3.70	4.50
	1888	2.75	3.00	3.60	3.25	4.00	3.65	4.50
	1889	3.15	3.40	3.60	3.65	4.00	4.05	4.50
	1890	3.30	3.55	3.60	3.80	4.00	4.20	4.50
	1891	3.15	3.40	3.60	3.65	4.00	4.05	4.50
	1892	3.45	3.70	3.60	3.95	4.00	4.35	4.50
Loss	1893	3.95	4.20	3.60	4.45	4.00	4.85	4.50
	1894	3.30	3.55	3.60	3.80	4.00	4.20	4.50
Profit	1895	3.15	3.40	3.60	3.65	4.00	4.05	4.50
	1896	3.10	3.35	3.60	3.60	4.00	4.10	4.50
	1897	3.95	4.20	4.20	4.45	4.45	4.85	4.85
	1898	3.90	4.15	4.15	4.40	4.40	4.90	4.90
	1899	3.60	3.85	4.00	4.10	4.10	4.50	4.50
	1900	3.90	4.15	4.15	4.40	4.40	4.80	4.80
	1901	3.90	4.15	4.15	4.40	4.40	4.80	4.80
	1902	3.60	3.85	4.00	4.10	4.10	4.50	4.50
	1903	3.40	3.65	4.00	3.90	4.00	4.30	4.50
Profit	1904	3.40	3.65	4.00	3.90	4.00	4.30	4.50
	1905	3.40	3.65	4.00	3.90	4.00	4.30	4.50
	1906	3.70	3.95	4.00	4.20	4.20	4.60	4.60
	1907	4.40	4.65	4.55	4.90	4.80	5.30	5.10
Loss	1908	4.65	4.90	4.55	5.15	4.80	5.55	5.10
	1909	4.65	4.90	4.55	5.15	4.80	5.55	5.10
	1910	4.10	4.35	4.35	4.60	4.80	5.00	5.00

Sources: See pp. 191, 201-206.

Colombo market prices are from WCO, COO, and COW.

the estates by the labourers. On the basis of the geographical location and the available transport facilities, it is possible to divide the planting districts in the Island into three main groups. First, there were the districts situated at the higher elevation with relatively scanty means of transport. To this group belong districts such as Badulla, Passara, Rakwana, Pundaluoya, and Haputale. Secondly, there were the districts such as Kandy, Matale, Dimbulla, and Dikoya situated at medium elevation and also had better means of transport. It was possible for the planters in these districts to obtain rice at a price lower than the planters in the first group of districts.[56] Thirdly, there were the low-country districts of Kalutara, Kelani Valley, and parts of Kegalle situated nearer to Colombo, and had the advantage of relatively greater accessibility due to their low elevation. In these districts, the cost of rice to the planters was less than the two former groups of districts.[57] The above division of the planting districts is not strictly accurate. An estate at medium elevation and situated near the network of rail communication could have obtained rice at a lower price than an estate in the low-country situated away from the main line of communication. However, on the whole our demarcation is admissible. This conclusion is confirmed by two sets of evidence. First, we have already seen in section 2 of the present chapter that, on the basis of the daily wage rates paid to the labourers, it is possible to divide the planting districts in to the same three groups of districts as we have done in this paragraph. At least as far as the up and mid-country groups of districts were concerned, different daily wage rates were adopted in these two groups of districts because of the regional variation in the price of rice between these two groups

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56. A general meeting of Uva DPA, 27 September 1897, COO, 20 October 1897.
A general meeting of Udapussellawa DPA, 19 June 1880, WCO, 24 June 1880.

57. Sec. of PAC to Col. Sec., 3 December 1897, PPAC 1898, Correspondence, p. ccxii.

of districts.[58] Secondly, scattered information available to us on the cost price of rice to the estates in the various districts confirm our division of the planting districts into the three divisions given above.

However, even in case of the three groups of districts indicated in the above paragraphs, it is not possible to obtain accurate and consistant data. The regional differences in the price of rice underwent changes from time to time over the 30 years of our study depending largely on the progress of the transport facilities in the planting districts and the changes in the margin of profit retained by the traders who supplied rice to the estates. In view of the scanty information available to us, the most we could do is to draw up a rough scale of the difference in the price of rice among the three groups of districts and test our conclusions against the qualitative information available to us on the regional state of the rice market.

Detailed evidence on the regional price of rice paid by the planters is available for the year 1908.[59] According to this information the planters in districts such as Badulla, Rakwana, Haputale, and Pundaluoya situated at higher elevation paid an average price of Rs.5.35-5.65 for a bushel of rice. In the same year the price in Colombo was Rs.4.65 suggesting an average difference of 80 cents to Re.1 per bushel between Colombo and the districts at higher elevations. The available evidence for the 1880s suggests that similar rates of difference existed in that period. Thus, in 1883 when the Colombo average price stood at Rs.2.47, the planters in Badulla paid an average rate of Rs.3.50 per bushel.[60] Details of annual prices maintained by a Bogawantalawa planter reveal that between 1880 and 1892 he paid an annual average of 86 cents more

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58. See above, pp. 173-174.

59. Cey. Lab. Com. 1908, Proceedings, Replies of the planting witnesses to Question No. 13.

60. AR of AGA. Badulla District, CAR 1883, p. 27A.

than the Colombo price.[61] Thus, it appears reasonable to adopt the conclusion reached on the basis of the evidence for the year 1908 that the planters in the higher elevations paid an average of 80 cents to Re.1 per bushel of rice more than the price in Colombo. The same set of evidence reveals that the planters in the districts situated at medium and low elevations paid approximately between 40-50 cents and 20-30 cents respectively more than the Colombo price to purchase rice for their estates.[62] The different prices paid by the planters of high, medium, and low elevations for the purchase of rice in the period from 1880 to 1910 are computed on the basis of the above conclusions and set out in columns 3, 5, and 7 in Table 4.7.

From the information available to us, it is possible to set up a reasonably acceptable scale about the price at which rice was issued by the planters to their labour force. The general concensus of the planters' views throughout the period from 1880 to about 1896 was that where male and female labourers were paid daily wage rates of 33 and 25 cents respectively and given "full work" of 20-24 days per month, they could be charged at the rate of Rs.4 per bushel of rice issued to them, without jeopardizing the labour supply to the estates.[63] This meant that the planters considered that a male worker earning between Rs.6.60 and Rs.7.20 per month (33 cents x 20-24 days) could be reasonably charged Rs.4 for rice per month because he was entitled to one bushel of rice per month and that a female worker earning between Rs.5 and Rs.6 per month (25 cents x 20-24 days) could be charged Rs.3 per month because she was entitled to obtain three quarter of rice per month from the estate. The above

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61. SCC, Written Answers, Cey. SP VI of 1894, p. c22.

62. Cey. Lab. Com. 1908, Proceedings, Replies of the planting witnesses to Question No. 13.
'The Kelani Valley Railway', by A. C. Kingsford, COO, 14 February 1894.
'The Kelani Valley Railway Scheme. Deputation to the Governor', ibid., 15 February 1894.

63. Cey. Lab. Com. 1908, Proceedings.

scale was regarded by the planters of estates situated at mid-elevation as a fair one which would leave a margin of savings for the labourers. In the districts situated at higher elevation and where the labourers were paid a relatively high daily wage rate, the planters considered Rs.4.50 per bushel of rice as the reasonable rate to be charged to the labourers.[64] In the districts situated at low elevation and where the labourers were paid a relatively low daily wage rate, Rs.3.60 was regarded as a reasonable charge to the labourers.[65] The planters' premise that these rates were reasonable will be examined in Chapter V. Here, it is sufficient to note the premise on which the planters acted in fixing the price at which rice was issued to the labourers.

The columns 4, 6, and 8 in Table 4.7 show the approximate rates discounted from the labourers' wages for rice issued to them by the estates. For the years from 1880 to 1896 we have adopted the rates given in the preceding paragraph because there is evidence that these rates were maintained by the planters during these years. A planter giving evidence before the Ceylon Silver Currency Commission in 1892 testified that rice was issued to the labourers at Rs.4 per bushel during the preceding 10 years.[66] This is confirmed by other evidence. Some planters paid the newly arrived labourers from South India an initial cash advance of Re.1 per head to obtain rice during the first week of work on the estates.[67] The usual weekly quota of rice being a quarter of a bushel, this rate of cash advances suggests that a bushel of rice cost Rs.4 to the labourers. Besides, the planters on several occasions pointed out that a labourer's wages of three days were sufficient to cover the cost of his weekly quota of rice.[68] This was confirmed by Lt. Governor, John Douglas--a man who

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64. 'Kanganies' Pay', by Reformee, WCO, 12 June 1880.

65. Sec. of PAC to Col. Sec., 3 December 1897, PPAC 1898, Correspondence, p. ccxiii.

66. Editorial, CCO, 10 June 1890.
SCC, Minutes of Evidence, Cey. SP VI of 1894, p. b4.

67. The Deputation of the PAC to the Gov., 15 August 1887, PPAC 1888, p.67.

68. Proceedings of the annual general meeting of PAC, PPAC 1881, p. 14.

became unpopular among the planters because of his sympathetic attitude towards the estate labourers.[69] At the standard wage rate of 33 cents per day, this works out to approximately Re.1 for the weekly quota of a quarter bushel which meant that a bushel of rice cost the labourer Rs.4.

The information set out in Table 4.7 reveals that during the period from 1880 to 1896, except in 1892-93, the planters purchased rice at a price less than the price at which they issued rice to the labourers. Thus, the planters were left with a profit. This conclusion is confirmed by the available qualitative evidence.[70] The planters were not quite outspoken about the profit they made on rice during these years. However, a few planters complaining about the loss they incurred in 1893, referred to their past experience of years of profit.[71] They justified such profits on the ground that they had incurred a loss on rice during the late 1870s when the price of rice was high and rice was issued to the workers at rates below the cost price to the estates.[72] When the price of rice increased in 1892-3 and the cost price to the estates exceeded Rs.4 per bushel, the planters incurred a loss in the transaction. The planters concern over the loss in rice in these two years is well documented. However, the high price of rice in 1892-3 was short-lived. The market price of rice fell below Rs.4 per bushel in 1894-6. Consequently, the planters again found it possible to obtain a profit on rice.

The years 1896-1910 present a basic change in the price scale on which the planters hitherto issued rice to the labourers. A new price scale seems to have come into being after 1896. The policy of

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69. Lt. Gov. to S of S., No. 144 of 12 October 1883, C.O. 384/145.

70. 'Profit on Rice', by M. P, WCO, 14 December 1880.
'The New Cooly Legislation', by J. B, ibid., 12 January 1884.
Editorial, COO, 10 June 1890.
'Equitable Taxation', by F. B, ibid., 29 February 1896.

71. SCC, Minutes of Evidence, Cey. SP VI of 1894, p. b4.
DMC, Proceedings, Cey. SP II of 1893, p. 20.

72. 'The Cooly Wages Legislation', by Cobdenite, WCO, 9 January 1884.

charging the labourers with a fixed rate for rice issued to them was dropped and a new principle of having a minimum and a maximum limit on the price of rice issued to the labourers was adopted by the planters. During these years, the planters appear to have acted in the belief that respective male and female labourers on the daily wage rates of 33 and 25 cents and working an average of 20-24 days per month could be charged a minimum rate of Rs.4 and a maximum rate of Rs.4.80 per bushel of rice issued to them.[73] The minimum rate of Rs.4 was regarded as a reasonable and a fair price which would ensure an adequate supply of labour while the above wage scale with rice at the maximum rate of Rs.4.80 was regarded as a minimum living wage for the labourers—a scale which should be avoided if possible except when the cost of rice was exceptionally high. It was thought that the latter scale would leave the labourers barely any savings and would discourage the labourers from coming to work on the estates. In the low-country districts where the price of rice was usually below that of the districts at medium elevation, the charge for rice issued to the labourers varied between Rs.4 and Rs.4.50 per bushel. In the districts at higher elevation where the planters had to pay a relatively high price to purchase rice, the labourers were charged between Rs.4.50 and Rs.5 per bushel. The upper limits charged to the labourers stated in this paragraph were obtained from the evidence in The Labour Commission Report of 1908. 1908 is the most reliable year for this information because in our period the market price of rice was at its highest in 1908. Therefore, the price charged in this year could be reckoned as the maximum rate which the planters sought to obtain from the labourers for rice issued to them.

The main reason for the evolution of the new scale after 1896 was the rise in the price of rice since that year. Unlike the increase in

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73. For the views of the planters, see the evidence given by the planting witnesses in reply to question No. 13 of the Labour Commission. Gov. Lab. Com. 1908, Proceedings.
See also, AnR of Udapussellawa DPA for 1897, COO, 9 February 1898.

the price of rice in 1892-3 which was short-lived, after 1896, the high price of rice came to stay. The average cost price of rice to the estates exceeded Rs.4 per bushel except in 1903-5 when there was a temporary decrease in the price. The planters' policy in the period 1897-1910 was to charge to the labourers a minimum stipulated rate when the estate purchase price of rice was below that rate. In such years, the planters were obviously left with a profit. When the estate purchase price of rice exceeded the maximum stipulated rate chargeable to the labourers, the planters charged to the labourers only that rate and thereby the planters incurred a loss. When the estate cost price of rice fell within the minimum and the maximum rates chargeable to the labourers, rice was issued to the labourers at the estate cost price.

It is possible to get some idea as to how the above stated scale operated, chronologically, in the years 1897-1910. In the years 1897-1902, the planters' average cost price fluctuated between the minimum and the maximum limits on the above scale. Therefore, during these years, the labourers were charged with the planters' cost price of rice. In the years 1903-5, the estate cost price of rice fell below the minimum price chargeable to the labourers and therefore the planters made a profit. In 1906 and again in 1910, the estate cost price of rice fell within the minimum-maximum scale chargeable to the labourers, and therefore the labourers were charged with the estate cost price. In the years 1907-9, there was a heavy increase in the market price of rice. Consequently, the estate cost price of rice exceeded the maximum rate on the scale and the planters had to incur a loss on rice supplied to the labourers in these two years.[74]

The foregoing analysis of the available statistical data reveals that the planters in fact subsidised the rice issued to the

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74. Cey. Lab. Com. 1908, Report, p. viii.

workers only in the years 1892-3 and 1907-9.[75] This conclusion is well supported by the available qualitative information.[76] First, the planters appear to have been vociferious whenever the market price of rice was too high for the planters to avoid making a loss on their part. A scrutiny of the proceedings of the meetings of the Ceylon Planters' Association, the District Planters' Associations, and also the information available in the pro-planter Press reveal that the outcry of the planters against high price of rice was virtually confined to the years 1892-3 and 1907-9. Secondly, the planters' reaction to the Customs Duty on imported rice and the rail freight on rice imposed by the Ceylon Government supports our conclusion that the loss on rice was confined to these years. Rice imported to the Island carried an import levy of 10 per cent of the import price of rice. On the Ceylon Government Railway, rice was classified as a second class commodity of transport and therefore had to pay a fairly high rail freight, particularly compared with commodities such as coffee and tea which were classified as sixth class commodities of rail transport. On the whole, the planters were against both the levy and the high rail freight because these inevitably increased the market price of rice. At times they launched vigorous and active agitation with the aim of getting the levy abolished and the rail freight reduced. It is interesting to note that such sustained agitation during the whole of the 30 years of our period were mainly confined to the years 1892-3 and 1907-9.[77] Apparently, among other factors, the loss which the

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75. There were, of course, exceptions to this general conclusion due to regional and monthly variations in the market price of rice. For instance, the high price of rice which lasted throughout 1907-9 really started in late 1906.

76. The Upper Maskeliya Estate Co. Ltd., Report for 1897, COO, 19 19 February 1898.
Yatiyantota Tea Co. Ltd., Report for 1898, ibid., 17 April 1899.

77. Editorials of ibid., 16 January 1893, 3 February 1893, and 18 March 1893.
'Rice Freight on Railway', by Oudeis, ibid., 6 September 1894.
'The Labour Question', by G. N. Thomson, COM, 12 April 1907.
'The Labour Question', by J. Gordon, ibid., 15 April 1907.

planters incurred on rice during these years prompted them to a relentless attack on the import duty and the rail freight. The absence of such agitation during the rest of the years suggests that the problem of the loss on rice was not felt by the planters throughout our period. The fact that the planters' loss on rice was confined to the years 1892-3 and 1907-9 reveals that during the rest of the years of our period the Customs Duty and the rail freight on rice fell primarily on the consumer.

It is clear from the above discussion and the information in Table 4.7 that the policy which the planters enunciated, shown by us in page 193 above did not work as avowed by the planters. A fixed price was charged to the labourers only either so long as it was profitable to the planters to do so or if it did not involve a continuous loss to themselves. When the price of rice came to stay at a high rate after 1896, the planters altered the policy of a fixed price charged to the labourers and adopted the policy of charging to the labourers the price at which the planters bought rice. When the planters did make a loss on rice, it was relatively infrequent. It was confined to the years during which the market price of rice was exceptionally high so as to make the whole of the monthly wages of an average labourer barely sufficient to cover the cost of his supply of rice (let alone his other necessities of life) if the market price was charged to the labourers.

During times of exceptionally high price of rice the planters had the alternative of raising the wage rates than making themselves a loss on rice. But the planters preferred the latter course.[78] The reason is clear from the information in Table 4.7. As several planters themselves pointed out, occasions when the price of rice was exceptionally high were rare.[79] Thus, a loss on rice to the planters was a temporary and a

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78. Editorial, ibid., 25 April 1907.
Cey. Lab. Com. 1908, Proceedings.

79. Ibid., p. 220.

rare phenomenon. When the price of rice settled down to the normal market rates, the planters never made a loss. A planter giving evidence before the Labour Commission of 1908 was clear on this point when he stated that the high prices in 1908 were abnormal and would soon go down.[80] The planters, on the other hand, believed that if the wage rates were raised when the price of rice increased, it would be difficult to lower the wage rate when the price of rice recedes; that an increase in wage rates once conceded would be a lasting phenomenon. The labourers were used to the idea of a fixed wage rate so much that it commanded a sort of a customary sanction among them. They were imported to the Island on the understanding of paying a fixed wage rate. Besides, administratively, the planters found a fixed rate of wages with a fluctuating rate of rice a relatively convenient arrangement than a wage scale which fluctuated with every fluctuation in the market price of rice in a situation where the market price fluctuated frequently. There was also the belief among the planters that any increase in the earnings of the labourers would be swallowed by the Chetties and the mony-lenders.[81]

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80. Ibid., p. 83.

81. 'Raising of Coolies' wages: An Opposing view to Mr. Rutherford', by A Planter, COM., 6 April 1907.

CHAPTER V

THE METHODS OF WAGE PAYMENT AND THE REAL INCOME

An endeavour is made in the present chapter to find out the actual economic conditions of the immigrant plantation workers in Ceylon in the period 1880-1910. On analysis it appears that while the basic economic necessities of the workers were realised, the methods by which such needs were fulfilled tied the workers to an economic life of debt-bondage. In sections 1-3 our attention will be devoted to these methods. Section 1 will concentrate on the method of payment of the labourers' wages in kind. Available evidence leads us to the conclusion that, on the whole, this method worked in the interest of the workers. In sections 2 and 3 where the methods of payment in money, viz., the payment of cash advances and the balance of wages, are examined it appears that these two methods contributed in varying degree to bind the labourer to a life of indebtedness to the kangany, the shop-keeper, and eventually to the estate. Of the two methods, however, the predominant factor causing labour indebtedness was the operation of the system of advances. In section 4 where an attempt is made to compare the rate of wages paid and the cost of living of the labourers we find that the wage of an average labourer was inadequate to meet the cost of his basic requirements, particularly in the years after 1890. The labourers subsisted on advances but the inadequate wages made a total wipe-off of their advances account infeasible. Consequently, their life was one of constant indebtedness being perpetually repaid with manual labour. The labourers acquiesced to this arrangement because it was nothing alien to their economic life in the villages of South India. Borrowing money in times of need and paying these loans off with one's manual labour was an economic fact in the life of the agricultural population of South India. The planters pursued the system because in the absence of any form of indenture

labour agreements in Ceylon, unlike most other countries where Indian immigrant labour was employed, labour indebtedness gave the planters the only practical hold over the labour force. The system, in fact, meant the grafting of some aspects of the economic life of the agricultural labourers in South India on to the plantation labour system in order to keep the labourers tied to the plantation. The entire system appears to have evolved customarily independent of statutory legislation.[1]

1. Payment in kind

The part-payment of the labourers' wages in kind took the form of a weekly supply of rice. The planters organised the supply of rice to the labourers with the object of making it an effective internal arrangement to maximize the daily turn-out of labourers for work. The labourers were required to turn up for a specified number of work-days per week before they were eligible for their weekly quota. When the labourers failed to work the specified number of days the weekly quota of rice was curtailed. This in fact meant the adoption of a technique of payment involving the indirect use of compulsion. Apparently, the labourers recruited from a peasant agricultural sector to a commercialized plantation sector, akin more to a modern industrial organisation, involving regular and consistent work, were found to lack adequate commitment to such work. It appears that among these labourers, who obviously lacked the necessary orientation and discipline required of a modern labour force, problems such as high labour turnover and excessive absenteeism were widespread and therefore some method of compulsion had to be used to get them commited to regular work. Besides, a substantial section of the Indian labour force in Ceylon was heavily indebted, particularly in the years after 1890 without any satisfactory means of paying back their debts. This plight made them

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1. Editorial, COO, 29 May 1890.
   Editorial, ibid., 7 June 1890.

indifferent towards regular work. The Labour Commission of 1908 found reason to conclude that the average labourer working 5 days in every 7 would not have worked as much as he did if it was not for the issue of rice being dependent upon the number of days the labourer actually worked.[2]

On the whole, the system of part-payment of wages in rice appears to have operated in the interest of the labourers for rice supplied by the estate was normally below the retail market price at which rice was available to the consumers in the localities where the plantations were situated.[3] This is clear from Table 5.1 below, which compares the price at which rice was issued to the labourers and the regional retail market price of rice as given in the annual Blue Books of the Ceylon Government. As we have seen earlier, it was essential for the labourers to be supplied with rice below a certain price if the planters were to maintain the level of daily wages paid to their labourers.[4] Secondly, it is apparent that the monthly quota of one bushel of rice per male, three quarter per female, and half per working child was more than the normal requirement of the average labourers of these categories.[5] This was particularly so where the labourers lived in family units as most of the plantation labourers in Ceylon did. There is overwhelming evidence that the quantities of rice which remained after meeting their normal requirements were bartered by the labourers with the local tradesmen to obtain at least a portion of the curry-stuff which the labourers needed.[6] Thirdly, when the market price of rice was exceptionally high, as in the years 1892-3 and 1907-9, the planters sustained a loss on rice supplied to their

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2. Cey. Lab. Com. 1908, Report, p. xi.
3. See also above, pp. 193ff.
4. Ibid.
5. Cey. Lab. Com. 1908, Appendix C, p. 610.
   Ibid., Appendix D, p. 612.
6. Ibid., Report, p. viii.

TABLE 5.1 The average retail price at which rice was available to the consumer in the planting districts situated at low, medium, and high elevations and the price charged to the labourers by the estates in the respective districts, 1880-1910 (in rupees and cents per bushel)

Year	Low elevation		Medium elevation		High elevation	
	Retail market price	Price to labourer	Retail market price	Price to labourer	Retail market price	Price to labourer
1880	3.50	3.60	4.00	4.00	5.00	4.50
1881	3.50	3.60	3.75	4.00	4.50	4.50
1882	3.50	3.60	3.75	4.00	4.50	4.50
1883	2.75	3.60	3.50	4.00	4.50	4.50
1884	3.00	3.60	3.84	4.00	4.50	4.50
1885	4.00	3.60	3.60	4.00	4.50	4.50
1886	3.00	3.60	3.50	4.00	4.80	4.50
1887	3.25	3.60	3.50	4.00	4.80	4.50
1888	3.25	3.60	4.00	4.00	4.80	4.50
1889	4.00	3.60	4.12	4.00	4.50	4.50
1890	3.83	3.60	4.25	4.00	4.88	4.50
1891	3.72	3.60	4.13	4.00	5.00	4.50
1892	4.21	3.60	4.75	4.00	5.25	4.50
1893	4.50	3.60	4.95	4.00	5.38	4.50
1894	4.30	3.60	4.19	4.00	5.00	4.50
1895	4.33	3.60	4.06	4.00	5.00	4.50
1896	3.83	3.60	4.88	4.00	5.00	4.50
1897	5.04	4.15	5.15	4.45	6.00	4.85
1898	4.88	4.15	4.75	4.40	5.25	4.90
1899	4.54	4.00	4.50	4.10	5.75	4.50
1900	4.90	4.15	5.00	4.40	6.00	4.80
1901	4.80	4.15	5.00	4.40	6.00	4.80
1902	4.75	4.00	4.50	4.10	6.00	4.50
1903	4.60	4.00	4.50	4.00	6.00	4.50
1904	4.60	4.00	5.13	4.00	5.50	4.50
1905	5.10	4.00	5.13	4.00	6.00	4.50
1906	5.60	4.00	5.50	4.20	6.73	4.60
1907	6.00	4.50	5.75	4.75	6.58	5.10
1908	6.25	4.55	5.88	4.80	6.25	5.10
1909	6.20	4.55	5.75	4.80	6.11	5.10
1910	5.87	4.35	5.50	4.80	6.00	5.00

labourers thereby lessening the burdensome impact on the labourers of the high market price of rice during the years of scarcity.[7] Fourthly, the system ensured the labourers a regular supply of their staple food. The purchase and the distribution of rice was sponsored by the estate. The consumption of rice among the large estate labour population was naturally large. To leave the labourers to purchase their own rice from the local tradesmen would have placed the labourers at the mercy of the trading classes. The advantage to the labourers of the regularity of the supply of rice was clearly seen during the depression of the early 1880s. These were years when the planters succumbed to grave financial difficulties and failed to pay a large number of the labourers their balance of wages.[8] But the supply of rice to the labourers proceeded unabatted because the labourers had to be provided with at least their basic food if they were to be retained on the estates.

However, the system of part-payment of wages in rice was not free from drawbacks from the point of view of the labourers. The actual distribution of rice was done by the kangany, the kanakapulle, or a Chetty.[9] There were complaints that short-measure was often in use.[10] Another grievance was that the quality of rice supplied to the labourers was inferior.[11] However, with the information at our disposal it is not possible for us to know the nature and the extent of the loss to the

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7. See above, pp. 193ff.

8. See below, pp. 227-228.

9. Appeal Court, J. H. Meedeniya Vs Ismail Saibu, COO, 23 August 1900. Cey. Sab. Lab. Com. 1915, para. 30.

10. Talawakele Notes, COO, 22 April 1893.
'Report on the alleged ill-treatment of Indian Coolies in Ceylon', by G.A. Sabaragamuwa Province, MPP, Vol. 8254, Pro. No. 626 of 21 August 1909.

11. Planting Notes from Maskeliya, The Overland Ceylon Observer, 21 June 1879.
A general meeting of Dimbulla DPA, 8 September 1882, MCO, 14 September 1882.
Editorial, COO, 10 June 1890.
Planting Notes from Central Dimbulla, ibid., 2 February 1892.

labourers on this count. Evidence also reveals that the bargains made by the labourers with the local shop-keepers in bartering excess rice were rarely of an advantageous nature to the labourers.[12] The shop-keepers usually purchased rice from the labourers below its actual value and in return gave provisions to the labourers at high prices. In spite of this disadvantage, the labourers continued to barter with the shop-keepers because it enabled them to obtain some of their other requirments from the latter on credit.[13] Though the system of part-payment of wages in rice had the short-comings stated above, the regularity and the certainty of a relatively cheap supply of rice on the estates made the system a useful oneto the labourers.

2. The payment of cash advances

The aim of this section is to analyse the implications of the working of the system of cash advances on the conditions of the immigrant plantation workers. On examining the available evidence we come to several important conclusions. First, that all cash advances given out by the planters did not ultimately reach the labourers though the latter were expected to work off the entire amount. Secondly, cash advances were given out by the estates without any regard to the ability of the labourers to repay these advances and this factor in a large measure contributed to subject the labourers to a state of debt-bondage to the kangany, the shop-keeper, and eventually to the estate. Finally, we will attempt to explain why the labourers did acquiesce to the system of cash advances.

It is difficult to know precisely how much of the cash advances eventually reached the labourers. Available information in this respect is meagre and scattered. But from it one can gather that the labourers were given approximately Rs.5 to Rs.10 per head as advances to induce

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12. Cey. Lab. Com. 1908, Report, p. viii
'Cooly Advances and Labour Supply', by Old Planter, COO, 7 June 1895.

13. Cey. Lab. Com. 1908, Report, p. viii.

to migrate to Ceylon.[14] These cash advances given to the prospective immigrants were either utilized by them to settle their debts in their villages or were left behind by them for the benefit of their relatives. This amount varied depending on the general economic conditions in the villages in South India.[15] In times of favourable agricultural seasons in South India the amount which had to be offered as advances to encourage the agricultural labourers to emigrate would have been high while in times of unfavourable agricultural seasons this amount would have been relatively low. It is comparatively easy to obtain information on the amount spent by the kanganies to cover the cost of transportation of the labourers to the estates and the cost of subsistence en route. The cost of transport obviously varied with the distance between the village in South India and the estate and the available transport facilities. In the 1890s, the cost per labourer en route varied between approximately Rs.4 by the North Road and Rs.8 by the Tuticorin-Colombo route.[16] With the restriction of immigration to the latter route in 1899 immigrants had to be imported at a transport cost of approximately Rs.8 per head. Thus, the only admissible conclusion one could arrive at on the amount spent on the labourers for their recruitment and conveyance to the estates is to present a vague figure averaging between Rs.9 and Rs.18. It is important to note that in the 1890s the planters considered Rs.10-Rs.20 as the desirable limit to be given out as advances to import labour from South India. After about 1904, this rate increased to Rs.30. In actual practice, the rates advanced exceeded this limit, particularly during times of scarcity of labour. The kanganies exercised great care to spend as little as possible on the labourers both at the time of recruitment and in the transportation of labourers so as

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14. AnR of CLC for 1906, YPAC 1906, p. 19.
'The Labour Question', by G. N. Thomson, COM, 12 April 1907.

15. Annual general meeting of PAC, 17 February 1905, YPAC 1904-1905, p. 55-56.

16. 'The Labour Question', by G. N. Thomson, COM, 12 April 1907.

to augment their own share of profit. The vested interest of the kanganies in the system of coast advances was clearly seen when they opposed the Tin Ticket System inaugurated in 1902 by the Ceylon Government to facilitate the transport of labourers from South India to the planting districts in Ceylon.[17] As we have seen earlier on, under this scheme the Ceylon Government undertook to bear the initial cost of transportation of labourers. The cost was to be subsequently reimbursed by the estates and was to be eventually added to the labourers' estate advances account. However, even after 1902, coast advances had to be given to the kanganies at least for the purpose of recruitment of labour even if the labourers were to be transported on the Tin Ticket System. Thus, throughout our period, the system of recruitment gave the kanganies the opportunity to retain for themselves a portion of the coast advances given out by the planters.[18]

It is extremely difficult to gather any information on the precise amount which reached the labourers out of the "local advances". However, there is sufficient evidence to show that the whole of the local advances did not ultimately reach the labourers.[19] The shop-keepers gained from the local advances by charging extortionate rates of interest on the labourers' credit at the bazaar. There was a general collusion among kanganies, shop-keepers, and money-lenders to wrest high advances from the estates to their own advantage. The planters were quite outspoken about the unscrupulous activities on the part of some kanganies and "outside creditors".[20] Besides, the kanganies appear to have been anxious to keep their gangs as well as superintendents in the dark regarding the true state of the labourers' accounts with them. All accounts between

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17. See above, pp. 86-88.

18. Annual general meeting of PAC, 17 February 1905, YPAC 1904-1905, pp. 54-55.

19. 'The Coolly Labour Question and Crimping', by X, COO, 20 March 1891.

20. Cey. Lab. Com. 1908, Appendix RR, p. 653.
A general meeting of PAC, 2 May 1903, YPAC 1903-1904, p. 47.

the labourers and their creditors were maintained by the kanganies. The average labourer did not know the exact nature of his initial debt to the kangany on his arrival in the Island nor his subsequent financial commitments. Where some labourers were aware of their initial debt to the kanganies, these labourers subsequently found their debt accounts interfered with by the kanganies to their disadvantage.[21] Regarding the kanganies' accounts with their labourers, the Labour Commission of 1908 found evidence "... to think that in many instances the labourer is made the victim of more or less deliberate fraud".[22] The Commission continued.

> We wish, however, very forcibly to bring to the attention of those who are responsible for estate management in Ceylon the great desirability of causing the accounts between the kanganies and their labourers to be subjected to a far closer scrutiny than is at present customary, and of doing all that in them lies to afford adequate protection from the rapacity of unscrupulous kanganies to the labourers in their employ.23

Where several individual planters did exercise supervision over the kanganies' accounts with their labourers, the average debt of the labourers was reported to be relatively low.[24] But such interest on the part of the superintendents were rare. The great majority of the planters preferred to leave the maintenance of the individual accounts of the labourers totally in the hands of the kanganies without any supervision on their part. The planters, on the whole, confined their accounts to the financial transactions between the kanganies and themselves. This was largely the result of the system of labour management on the estates where the kangany played the role of labour contractor, holding himself responsible to the estate for money given by the estate for the recruitment and the management of the labour gang. Besides, the system whereby the kanganies maintained the individual accounts of the labourers saved the planters of a great deal of trouble of having to take care of the detailed accounts of the labourers.

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21. Sub editorial, CCO, 27 April 1895.
22. Cey. Lab. Com. 1908, Report, p. viii.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid., Proceedings, p. 442.

The advantages derived by the kanganies and the "outside creditors" from the system of indiscriminate estate advances tended to foster the growth of an economic élite among the Indian population in the planting districts.

Though the advances given out by the estates were not wholly utilized for the benefit of the labourers, the latter were expected to work off the entire amount of the advances. The gangs of labourers were regarded as security for the entire amount of advances given out by the estates. However, the rates of advances given out, particularly during the seasons of heavy demand for labour in the years from 1890 to 1910, were in most cases out of proportion to the labourers' ability to pay back. While advances as high as Rs.100 per head were offered in some districts, the average advances in the seasons of peak work load during the 1890s stood between Rs.30 and Rs.40. Thereafter it averaged between Rs.40-Rs.50. The usual method followed by the estates to recover the advances was to take in one months balance of wages of the labourers every two months. When outstanding advances were reasonably low during the coffee period it was found possible to defray the advances account of the labourers with the balance of wages. In the years of prosperity under tea, when the total monthly wage of the labourers were relatively high, the monthly balance of wage of an adult male labourer stood between Rs.2 to Rs.3.[25] This meant that the maximum an average labourer could hope to defray from the estate advances account by working a whole year could not have possibly exceeded Rs.18. The estates had to give out fresh advances at least annually, especially during seasons of the heavy yield of tea. Thus, fresh advances were obtained from the estates without totally working off the old advances. The inevitable result was the accumulation of the labourers' total indebtedness which tended to increase annually without any hope of a total wipe out except by the transfer of the gang to another estate on a tundu.

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25. See below, Table 5.4 (p. 251).

The system of estate advances also contributed to increase the "outside debt" of the labourers. The money-lenders and the shop-keepers were ready to offer credit to the labourers because of the labourers' ability to obtain cash advances from the estates in times of labour shortage.[26] In giving out credit to the labourers the "outside creditors" looked to the prospective advances to the labourers' from the estate as security. They sought to recover the labourers' debt by pressing the kanganies to pressurize the planters to give out higher advances.[27] Legally the creditor had the power to imprison the debtor for non-payment of the debt. The "outside creditors" often used this power as a threat to get the kanganies move from estate to estate in search of higher advances. Thus, the "outside debts" gave the "outside creditors" a firm hold over the kanganies and their gangs of labourers.[28] The labour gangs were used as pawns by the "outside creditors" to wrest heavy advances from the estates.

As far as the kanganies were concerned, besides enhancing their income, the advances system provided them with an instrument to exert control over their gangs. In the coffee period gangs were mostly relatives and the kangany was regarded as a paternal head. Therefore a link of kinship provided the kangany with a hold over his gang which was supplemented by the labourer's debt because the kangany was the sole financier of the labourers. We have seen in chapter II that with the development of the head kangany system the tie of kinship declined during the tea period and especially the head kangany's hold over his gang as a community leader weakened. His hold over the labour force became increasingly one of debt. As a planter pointed out, "No doubt his (kangany's) power is due to the chain of debt... his chief security is in the heaviness of those

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26. 'Mr. Charles Young's Opinion', CCO, 14 May 1895.

27. ' The Labour Question', by Aberdonesis, ibid., 17 May 1895.
'Our Labour Supply and the Tundu System', by Agricola, ibid., 22 May 1895

28. 'How Money paid for Advances goes', ibid., 27 May 1895.

silver chains."[29] It was this hold that made it possible for the kanganies to move gangs in search of higher advances. There is evidence that at times the labourers were not inclined to move frequently from one estate to another but that they were compelled to do so by their kanganies.

It is left for us to consider as to why the labourers acquiesced into the system of cash advances and consequent heavy indebtedness. This question is particularly significant in the light of the legal position of the labourers regarding credit obtained by them. For all credit obtained from the estates, the money-lenders, and the shop-keepers, it was the kangany who was responsible. All cash advances were obtained by the kangany on legally valid Promissory Notes. Legally the labourer could not be held responsible for the debts and he had the right to leave the employer, irrespective of his debts, either at one month's notice or if his wages were not paid to him for more than sixty days. The labourers, however, were quite alive to their obligation of debt.[30]

The explanation for the labourers' acquiscence into a life of indebtedness is found in the customs and traditions which had conditioned their economic behaviour in South India. It was a common practice among the agricultural labourers in South India to raise advances in their villages, particularly in times of financial needs for such purposes as festivals, marriages, and funerals.[31] These debts were usually settled by performing manual labour. This creditor-debtor relationship was hardly affected by legal norms. It was primarily based on custom. The immigrants carried with them their traditional values and attituds to the country to which they migrated. The customary debt relationship to which the labourers were used in South India governed their behaviour in the

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29. 'The Kangany System and the Coast Advances', by '1873', ibid., 7 June 1890.

30. Cey. Lab. Com. 1908, Report, p. ix.

31. Resettlement Report of Salem District, MBRP, Vol. 7176, Pro. No. 212 of 15 July 1905, p. 29.

planting districts in the Island as well. Cash advances were obtained by the labourers from the kanganies and they acquiesced into debt-servitude until that debt was settled. Social custom forbade evasion of debt. Customary obligation regarding debt was so strong among the immigrant labour population that it was quite common for gangs of labourers to take over the debt of their deceased relatives even though there was no legal obligation to do so.[32] It is the customary acquiscence to the obligation for debt which made the planters repeatedly refer to the Indian immigrant labourers in Ceylon as very honest men.[33] The Labour Commission of 1908 found that the labourer's willingness to discharge his liabilities was "... dependent upon his sense honour and the loyalty which he feels himself to owe to his fellow-labourers and to his kangany."[34] This was the result of the customary social values to which he was accustomed in South India. On the estates in Ceylon the immigrant found his staple food advanced to him by the estate, his other requisites such as subsidiary food-stuffs and clothing advanced by the shop-keeper, and his occasional demand for cash advances met by the kangany. The amount of debt did not bother him so long as he could obtain fresh advances. He migrated from his village on cash advances and continued to work on the estates on advances and in indebtedness--a way of life so familier to him in South India. His conservatism, poverty, ignorance, and illiteracy kept him to his customary way of life in spite of his legal rights to the contrary.

The view expressed in the above paragraph is confirmed by the available evidence which strongly suggests that discontent among the labourers increased mainly when fresh advances were not forthcoming. The expression of labour discontent took the form of either bolting or giving

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32. 'Coolies-Advances-Debts-Mortality on Feverish Estates - A Black Picture', by an Old Planter, COO, 24 May 1894.
'The Labour Question in Ceylon', ibid., 21 October 1895.

33. Labour Question. Report of the special committee of PAC, Memoranda Re. Labour Question, YPAC 1902-1903, p. 8.

34. Cey. Lab. Com. 1908, Report, p. ix.

TABLE 5.2 Some available information on the state of indebtedness of the estate labourers, 1907-8 (amount in rupees)

Planting district	Planter	Total average debt per labourer	Average debt per labourer to estate	Average debt per labourer to kangany
Kalutara	F.R.Dakeyne	N	25-35	30-40
	F.J.Wright	N	104	N
	W.N.Tisdell	47	17	30
	H.A.Tipple	50	25	25
Madulkele	J.P.Hortin	70	55	15
	S.G.Jackson	42	N	N
Dikoya	T.Gidden	43	15	28
Kotmale	A.G.Forbes	47	22	25
	J.Duncan	40	N	N
Badulla	John Rettie	22	14	8
Haputale	T.Davidson	60-70	20	40-50
Dimbulla	W.L.Strachan	41-44	N	N
	A.H.Thomas	N	7	N
Knuckles	A.D.Donald	76	N	N
Matara	E.A.Clive	60	30	30
Gampola	G.C.Bliss	N	22	N
Rangala	W.Sinclair	60	30	30
Matale	R.W.Bolling	40	N	N
	J.Taylor	54	N	N
	L.R.Rudd	N	25	N
Nawalapitiya	M.S.Milne	43	24	19
	D.S.Cameron	16-17	10	6-7
	L.S.G.Carey	N	N	50-60

Source: Cey. Lab. Com. 1908, Proceedings.

Note: It is not possible to find out any information on the state of the labourers' debt to the shop-keeper. However, it is likely that the labourers' debt to the shop-keeper would have eventually found its way to the labourers' debt account with the kangany.

N: No information available

a month's notice to quit the estate. In our period, the incidence of bolting and"notice giving" was heaviest in the years from 1902 to 1904. The extent of the problem so alarmed the planters that the Ceylon Planters' Association appointed a special Committee in 1902 to investigate the questions of bolting and "notice giving".[35] It is significant that 1902-4 were also the years when the rates of advances were generally low following the slump in the tea industry. During these years the planters did not readily succumb to the demand for advances. Where heavily indebted labourers did bolt or quit an estate, such behaviour on the part of the labourers was not directly due to the burden of debt but the result of their inability to obtain further cash advances from the estate in addition to their existing heavy debts.[36]

3. The payment of the balance of wages

The main argument in this section is that the methods of payment of the balance of wages practised by the planters up to 1908 in some ways did operate to increase the labourer's total debt and tighten his debt-servitude, but that particularly after 1890 the predominant factor contributing to the labourer's indebtedness was the working of the advances system. At the outset we will look into the method of deferred payment of wages of the coffee period which formed the basis of the labourer's "outside debt". This customary method of payment was badly disturbed in the early 1880s due to the economic catastrophe in the plantation sector. The Colonial Government stepped into safeguard the wages of the labourers. We will examine how it attempted to do so, first, by trying to intervene into planter-labour industrial relations, and subsequently by attempting

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35. Labour Question. Report of the special committee of PAC, Memoranda Re. Labour Question, YPAC 1902-1903, pp. 1-17.
'Proctors and Notice Coolies', by P. H. Papillon, COW, 5 May 1902.

36. 'Coolies and their Advances', by A. E. Wright, COO, 17 April 1895.
'Labour and Cooly indebtedness up-country', COW, 20 May 1902.
Editorial, ibid., 18 September 1902.

to encourage the planters to move towards more frequent payment of wages. The planters of 1880[s] resisted both these attempts. However, after 1890 the planters began to gradually break away from the pre-1890 method of wage payment. We will analyse the motivation behind this change of attitude, and attribute it mainly to the planters' desire to destroy the labourers' "outside credit". Finally, we will attribute the non-fulfillment of the desire of the tea planters to the growth of a new basis of "outside credit" for the labourers in the offer of indiscriminate cash advances to the labourers by the estates. Thus, we will conclude that the actual basis of the labourers' indebtedness in the years after 1890 was the advances system rather than the method of payment, the latter being the view held by the majority of the planters towards the end of our period.

The wage law as embodied in the Master-Servant Ordinance No. 11 of 1865 stipulated that if a month's wages clear of debt remained unpaid at the end of the succeeding month, two months' notice was sufficient for the labourer to leave the employer or to refuse to work.[37] However, the widely accepted practice in the period was for the planters to pay their labourers four times in the year in quarterly payments, but always retaining in arrear with the employer the balance of wages of the labourers for a period of three months. This meant that the wages due to the labourers for the months from January to March were paid at the end of June. Besides, the balance of wages were not paid direct into the hands of the labourers but to the kangany. The kangany in turn deducted what the labourers owed him and the shop-keeper and handed over the balance to the labourers. The above method continued up to 1890. It was thought that the method of deferred payment gave the employer a hold over his labourers. The planters jealously guarded this hold over their labour force in order to recover the outlay of "coast advances" already spent by them in

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37. Clause 21 of the Ordinance. See PPAC 1885, Correspondence, p. xxxv.

getting the labourers from South India and also to keep their labourers tied to the estates during the coffee picking season without the risk of the labourers deserting the estates. It has been shown that the underlying factor for the planters' preference for infrequent payment was the shortage of working capital under which the coffee planters of Ceylon had to work. Most of the coffee estates in Ceylon were managed by proprietor planters. There were no large companies with adequate working capital.[38] Besides, coffee was a highly seasonal crop and the coffee planters received their earnings seasonally and had therefore to defer some of their financial commitments until their earning actually reached them. Thus, the nature of the coffee economy contributed to the practice of infrequent payment of the balance of wages.[39]

The intensity of the planters' conviction in the need to preserve the system of deferred wage payment was clearly seen in the first decade of our period when the planters fought hard to retain the existing system in the face of attempts by the Colonial Government to introduce a system of frequent payment of the balance of wages of the labourers. The main reason which prompted the Government to intervene in the 1880s into planter-labour wage relations was the widespread default on the part of the planters to maintain the existing arrangement of quarterly payment with three months in arrears. The planters in the throes of their worst financial crisis failed to completely honour their wage commitments towards their labour force and the balance of wages of the labourers got accumulated in long arrears.[40] The labourers of those coffee estates which went bankrupt lost their long accumulated back-pay. Where estates changed hands during the depression, the new owners refused to honour

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38. N. Ramachandran, 1963, p. 2.

39. L. R. Jayawardena, unpublished dissertation for research fellowship, Cambridge, 1960, pp. 27-32.

40. Gov. to S of S., No. 144 of 12 October 1883, C.O. 384/145.
CH 1883-1884, 19 December 1883, p. 13.
Cases instituted by labourers on coffee estates to recover wages, CGC, (weekly series, 1884-1886).

large outstanding arrears of wages.

The system of deferred payment of the balance of wages had worked so far on the mutual trust and confidence among the planters, the kanganies, and the labourers. Those labourers who stayed on in the estates during the bad years of the coffee depression subsisted mainly on the quota of rice supplied by the estates as part-payment of the wages. Like their employers they stayed on hoping for better days. But the protracted depression appeared to rule out the possibility of a satisfactory settlement of the problem of the arrears of back-pay. There was, of course, the legal safeguard for the labourers. But this safeguard embodied in the Master-Servant Ordinance No. 11 of 1865 made only up to three months' arrears of wages a first charge on the estate. Besides, the widespread poverty, ignorance, and illiteracy of the labourers were serious practical obstacles for them to recover even the wages guranteed by the law.[41] The inadequacy of the existing wage law was seen in 1883 when several kanganies instituted legal action against their employers in order to recover the balance of wages of their labour gangs. These few attempts were quashed due to a technical loophole in the law.[42] The magistrate found that under the existing law the labourers could not jointly sue their employer and that they could do so only individually and severally. In practice, this amounted to a denial of the labourers' right to sue their employers because the labourers could not afford to file individual action against their employers.[43] When the inadequacy of the law became clear the Colonial Government quickly moved into rectify the situation, especially since non-payment of wages was on the increase with the continuance of the depression.

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41. Gov. to S of S., No. 1 of 3 January 1884, C.O. 384/151.
Gov. to S of S., No. 144 of 12 October 1883, 384/145.

42. The Times of Ceylon, 27 October 1883.
'Coolies' Wages', PPAC 1884, Correspondence, pp. 162-166.

43. CH 1883-1884, 19 December 1883, p. 13.
A special committee meeting of PAC, 21 September 1883, PPAC 1884, p. 80.

After preliminary investigations into the wage situation in the estates, the Lt. Governor John Douglas discovered much to his surprise that withholding of balance of wages in long arrears had become quite common.[44] He realised that a mere closing of the loophole in the existing law was insufficient to adequately safeguard the wages of the labourers, particularly in view of the large overdue back-pay; and that it should be accompanied by a certain measure of Government intervention into planter-labour relations. His draft Ordinance provided for joint suit by the labourers and also sought to extend the period for which the wages were a first charge on the estate recoverable by writ against property to a period of 6 months.[45] Besides, the draft also provided for the employer to forward quarterly returns to the Government Agent of the Province specifying the number of labourers employed, the amount of wages agreed upon to be paid, the advances given, and the wages due if any at the end of each quarter of the year. In the event of failure to submit such returns or the submission of incomplete returns, the Government Agent was empowered to go to the estate and ascertain for himself what the returns had failed to disclose. In short, the Government Agent was to be given the power to directly interrogate the labourers on questions pertaining to wages. The draft also provided the mode of recovery of the arrears of wages and prescribed the imposition of a penalty upon anybody obstructing the Government Agent in the exercise of his duties specified in the Ordinance.

The draft Ordinance infuriated the planters. They vehemently opposed any form of Government intervention into planter-labour relations and wanted to maintain the status quo in which they had a free hand in their dealings with the labourers.[46] They also protested against the

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44. Col. Sec. to Sec. of PAC, 31 October 1883, PPAC 1884, Correspondence, p. 161.

45. For the draft Ordinance, see Col. Sec. to Sec. of PAC, 18 December 1883, enclosure, ibid., pp. 171-177.
See also, CH 1883-1884, 19 December 1883, p. 12.
Ibid., 4 February 1884, p. 39.

46. Chairman of PAC to members, 3 January 1884, PPAC 1884, Correspondence, p. 179.

provision extending the period for which the wages were to be a first charge on the estates because it meant that a greater amount of capital would be liable to be used to pay up arrears of wages.[47] On the whole, the planters' contention was that the existing law was adequate to safeguard the wages of the labourers if only the technical loophole in the law was closed up and the labourers were given the right of joint suit against their employers.[48]

While the controversy on the draft Ordinance was raging, Sir Arthur Gordon arrived as Governor. The planters hoped that the new Governor would totally withdraw the draft Ordinance at least for the time being in order to begin his period of governorship in a peaceful atmosphere. But the time and the circumstances had outrun such a possibility. By mid-1884 the facts on arrears of wage payment had already come to the knowledge of the Government and had already been made public, and even the planting community and the Legislative Council had admitted the necessity for further protection of the labourers' wages.[49] In any case, Gordon himself was of the view that the labourers' wages should be secured for them.[50]

However, the planters' agitation against Government interference mounted in intensity. They argued that the high incidence of large-scale accumulation of arrears of wages was something unusual, the result not of the planters' fault but of their plight and that this situation was being gradually ameliorated with the recovery of the plantation sector following the growth of the tea industry.[51]

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47. CH 1883-1884, 4 February 1884, p. 44.

48. A special general meeting of PAC, 8 January 1884, PPAC 1884, pp. 101, 106.

49. Sec. of PAC to Col. Sec., 24 November 1883, ibid., Correspondence, p. 167.
Sec. of PAC to Col. Sec., 15 December 1883, ibid., p. 170.

50. Reply to the address presented to the Gov. by PAC, ibid., p. 93.

51. A special committee meeting of PAC, 8 January 1884, ibid., pp. 98, 101.

In view of the "most determined, general and violent opposition" offered by the planters Gordon was ready to make certain amendments in the draft to make it palatable to the planters and in this decision he was influenced by three factors. First, he correctly saw that the successful working of the Ordinance depended on winning over the confidence and the support of the planters.[52] Secondly, Gordon came to Ceylon immediately after a governorship in Mauritius (1870-4) where his relations with the planting community in that colony had not been cordial, particularly due to his reforms pertaining to the immigrant labour system in that colony.[53] This record of his administration in Mauritius was obviously known to the planters in Ceylon. Gordon was anxious to prevent the Ceylon planter--the most powerful community in the Island whose good-will was considered essential for the smooth administration of the colony--getting obsessed with the idea that he was an anti-planter man. He informed the Colonial Office that if a bill so distasteful to the planters was enacted, "No amount of argument, no protestations on my part, no subsequent friendliness of act or speech would have been sufficient to heal the wounds thus created."[54]

At the same time both Gordon and Douglas felt that the Government must possess some sort of a reserve power to step in whenever the arrears

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52. Gov. to S of S., No. 195 of 21 May 1884, C.O. 54/151.
Gov. to S of S., No. 118 of 27 March 1884, ibid.
CH 1883-1884, 19 December 1883, p. 15.

53. Prior to his appointment as Governor of Ceylon (1883-90) Gordon held five governorships--in New Brunswick, Trinidad, Mauritius, Fiji, and New Zealand. In Trinidad, Mauritius, and Fiji where he had to deal with the Indian immigrant labour problem Gordon did much to improve their conditions, and even earned the enmity of the planters, particularly in Mauritius for his humanitarian and liberal attitude towards the immigrant labour in that colony.
On Gordon's career as a British colonial administrator, see J. K. Chapman, 1964.
Strangely, Chapman has not a word to say about Gordon's work relating to Indian labour problem in Ceylon which occupied a prominent place in his administration and which veered the planters most violently against him in spite of his other work to help the plantation sector.

54. Gov. to S of S., No. 1 of 3 January 1884, C.O. 384/151.

of wages were in jeopardy approaching a near scandle.[55] They felt that such power of intervention were essential to ensure a substantial degree of justice to the labourers and to see that the labourers were not subject to loss and fraud. With these views, Gordon found full support from the Colonial Office and the senior Government officials in the Island.

Gordon's amended draft stripped the powers given in the original Ordinance to the Government Agent to intervene into planter-labour relations. It also abandoned the provision to extend the period of lien to 6 months and retained the existing limit of 3 months. The only novel provision in the amended draft was that the Government retained the right of information on the wage situation in the estates and a reserve power of interference in cases where the labourers' wages were unjustly withheld.[56] Every superintendent was required by law to submit quarterly returns stating the date on which the labourers have been paid in full, under penalty of fine or imprisonment. The Government was to have special powers of interference in cases in which the wages of labourers were in jeopardy of being lost. In such cases the Colonial Secretary after full inquiry was to inform the Attorney-General to take action. The Government, however, pointed out that its right of interference will be used only in exceptional circumstances when interference became absolutely necessary. Amidst mounting criticism from the planters against any form of Government interference, Gordon enacted the Ordinance No. 16 of 1884 embodying the provisions indicated above.[57]

The history of the Ordinance during its short life of four years was one of failure. The planters continued to condemn the Ordinance as

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55. CH 1883-1884, 4 February 1884, p. 47.
Gov. to S of S., No. 144 of 12 October 1883, C.O. 384/145.

56. Gov. to S of S., No. 1 of 3 January 1884, C.O. 384/151.
CH 1883-1884, 19 December 1883, p. 15.

57. A special general meeting of PAC, 8 January 1884, PPAC 1884, pp. 100-105
Sec. of PAC to Col. Sec., 16 January 1884, ibid., Correspondence, p. 180.

paving the way for "inquisitorial interference", and time and again they agitated for its repeal. Gordon saw that some of the provisions of the Ordinance had been "... practically defied with substantial impunity" by the planters.[58] Only a few quarterly returns were submitted to the Government and even these were incomplete.

The main weakness as regards the attempt at Government interference into wage relations was that it was piecemeal. For these piecemeal measures of interference to be successful, they had to have the co-operation and the support of the planters. But where the planters bitterly opposed such interference, Government supervision and control had to be done on a comprehensive scale backed by an adequate administrative machinery if such measures were to be effective. In the Colonial Office, the Indian Government, and the Colonial Government, there was the basic question whether such a comprehensive scheme of Government intervention was necessary at all in case of Indian labour migration to Ceylon. The overall attitude of the day was that such comprehensive state control and supervision was necessary only in case of Indian emigrants who went to distant colonies under long-term indenture contracts.[59] In Ceylon, where the labourers were on monthly contracts and where the distance between their villages and the plantations was relatively short it was felt that comprehensive state control and supervision of planter-labour relations was not quite necessary. Gordon himself came round to this view. This was in fact one reason why he scrapped the administrative machinery which Douglas provided in his draft Ordinance for the Government to intervene into planter-labour industrial relations. In the years after 1884, this view hardened in Gordon. Besides, he saw that the non-payment of balance of wages in the early 1880s was an unusual event. With the

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58. Gov. to S of S., No. 125 of 14 May 1888, C.O. 384/168.

59. See above, pp. 37-52.

recovery of the plantation sector the incidence of such default was on the decline. The main drawback in the plantation labour life in Ceylon was that the labourers recruited on monthly contracts were being kept for longer periods by deferred payment of wages.[60] Gordon gradually began to view that what was really necessary in Ceylon was not Government interference but to make the labourers truely monthly servants by making legal provision for the employers to pay the wages of their labourers monthly.

The opportunity for Gordon to revise the wage law on the lines indicated above arose in 1888. In that year, in a case which appeared before the judiciary, the magistrate delivered a verdict which virtually invalidated all existing planter-labour monthly contracts. The court held that there was no legal base for the existing practice by which monthly contracts were entered into by the planters with their labourers.[61] The customary practice was for the planter to offer the newly recruited labourer with an advance in rice or money and enter the labourer's name in the estate Check-roll. Hitherto, this encounter was regarded as a verbal contract between the employer and the labourer. The judgement challenged this notion, pointing out that the prevailing practice amounted only to an implied contract and that such implied contracts had no legal sanction under the existing law. The planters, in constant fear of sudden desertion of the labourers, quickly got up an agitation calling for the revision of the labour law so as to place the customary practice on a firm legal footing.[62]

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60. Gov. to S of S., No. 451 of 6 November 1888, C.O. 384/168.
Gov. to S of S., No. 481a of 25 November 1889, C.O. 384/172.

61. Case No. 2,032 of Police Court, Badulla.
Gov. to S of S., No. 125 of 14 May 1888, enclosure I, Supreme Court Circular, C.O. 384/168.
This case followed by two other cases which tended to undermine the existing relations between the planters and the labourers. These were the case No. 3,278 of Police Court, Hatton and case No. 866 of Court of Requests, Hatton. See, ibid.

62. Thirty-fourth AnR of PAC, PPAC 1888, p. xxii.
Report of the deputation to the Gov., 15 August 1887, ibid., pp. 63-72.

Gordon drafted a new Ordinance embodying the planters' request. At the same time Gordon introduced in the draft Ordinance the idea of monthly payment of balance of wages of the labourers. Gordon's aim, however, was not to enforce monthly payment but to encourage the planters to adopt it.[63] The draft embodied that if a labourer was not paid his balance of wages at the end of the next succeeding month, the labourer should be rightfully eligible to quit without giving any form of notice. Thus, monthly payment was to be looked upon as a condition of the renewal by implication of the contract of service, and the punitive checks on the labourer for insubordination, neglect of work, and desertion were to be disregarded when the payment of wages was delayed.[64] Gordon explained to the Colonial Office in 1888 that

> ... if the wages of a cooly are more than one month in arrears, he shall be released from all the liabilities to which he is subject as to notice, and may leave his employer's service when he will. The desire not to arrive at this state of things will, I think, be a sufficient incentive to ensure regularity of payment.65

Gordon meant this new gurantee of the regularity of payment to substitute the earlier gurantee of Government interference embodied in the Ordinance of 1884.[66] The draft Ordinance therefore made provision to abolish the Ordinance of 1884.

As with Government interference so also with monthly payments, the planters were infuriated.[67] The arguments with which they backed up their protest against the draft Ordinance reveal some of their basic ideas about the labour system. As we have seen earlier on, the system of deferred payment of wages gave the planters a hold over their labour force

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63. Gov. to S of S., No 451 of 6 November 1888, 384/168.
64. Gordon's view was that any provision in the law calling for the labourers to give notice of their intention to quit would in its self place practical difficulty on the labourers in using this right to quit in case of non-payment of wages.
Gov. to S of S., Confidential, 22 April 1890, C.O. 384/176.
65. Gov. to S of S., No. 125 of 14 March 1888, C.O. 384/168.
66. Gov. to S of S., No. 451 of 6 November 1888, ibid.
67. A general meeting of PAC, 7 December 1889, PPAC 1889, pp. 65-75.

both as a set-off against the advances given to the labourers as well as a means of keeping the labourers tied to the estates during the coffee peak season. They made this clear thus, "... we require a fair and reasonable power to retain in our hands a certain amount of the value of the coolies' labour as a set-off against the moneys advanced."[68] Besides, any provision permitting the labourers to desert without giving notice was regarded by the planters, with some truth as regards unscrupulous kanganies, as an encouragement for "crimping" by letting open loopholes in the law. They insisted on the labourers giving 48 hours notice for the payment of the balance of wages irrespective of the period for which the wages were due. Only the non-payment within 48 hours, they argued, should entitle the labourers to quit without giving one month's notice. The planters unanimously resolved to oppose the enactment of the idea of monthly payment and the self-acting clause.[69] They protested that the draft Ordinance would lead them "... in chaos and would find themselves in a worse position than before", and demanded that the draft should be amended so as to recognise quarterly payment and to make the self-acting clause effective only when the wages were not paid for a quarter of a year before the end of the next succeeding quarter.[70]

Gordon, on the other hand, firmly believed that the system of deferred payment was detrimental to the interest of the labourers and should be done away with. In a series of despatches to the Colonial Office, Gordon built up a convincing case for monthly payment and the self-acting principle.[71] The system of deferred payment drove the labourer into debt-bondage in two ways. First, the labourers had to obtain their

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68. Ibid., speech by R. K. Rutherford, p. 63.

69. Ibid., pp. 66-77.
Thirty-fifth AnR of PAC, PPAC 1889, p. xxvii.

70. Proceedings of a general meeting of PAC, 7 December 1889, ibid., p. 69.
Gov. to S of S., No. 451 of 6 November 1888, enclosure 1, 384/168.

71. Gov. to S of S., No. 125 of 14 March 1888, ibid.
Gov. to S of S., No. 451 of 6 November 1888, ibid.

requirements from the shop-keeper on credit till such time as their balance of wages were paid to them by the estate, and the shop-keeper usually charged heavy rates of interest. As Gordon observed

> ... if his wages for any one month can be withheld from him for nearly, six months at the end of that time he is deeply in debt to the Kangani and the Bazaar. His only chance of discharging these debts is by waiting on in the service of the Estate for his pay, he takes further advances which bind him to the Estate yet more closely and he can hardly be deemed a free monthly servant.72

Besides, infrequent pay enabled the labourers to obtain "outside" credit because the shop-keeper and the money-lender regarded the arrears of the labourers' pay which remained with the employer as a security for credit given out to the labourers. This was secured by handing out the balance of wages direct to the kangany. The kangany settled whatever debt the labourers owed to the shop-keeper and handed over the balance, if any, to the labourer. Therefore, the basis of the debt-bondage of the labourers appeared to be the method of payment of the balance of wages. Gordon's aim was to radically change the entire basis of the immigrant labour system in the Island, which kept the labourers tied to the estates by debt-bondage, so as to make Ceylon attractive to the Indian immigrant labourers by holding out the prospects of prompt payment of wages and freedom from debt. Gordon's views were too advanced of the times. The planters of the 1880s recovering with a new crop on the heels of the depression of their old staple were neither in an economically stable position nor in an enlightened state of mind to risk experiments about the approach to the problem of labour supply. Only a few planters were disposed to agree with Gordon that monthly payment was ultimately in their own interest. Gordon also pointed out that the system of deferred payment was inconsistent with the idea of any truely monthly contract. He wrote

> If a labourer be indeed a monthly servant he should be paid his wages monthly. If he is to be indentured for a longer period, the law should not adopt the fiction that he is a voluntary monthly servant voluntarily reengaging from month to month.73

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72. Ibid.

73. Gov. to S. of S., No. 481a of 25 November 1889, C.O. 384/172.

Gordon was incredulous about the planters' contention that the labourers preferred delayed payment of a lump sum as against the frequent payment of small sums. Recalling his experience as Governor in British Guiana and Mauritius, Gordon pointed out that the same argument was put forward by the planters of those colonies as an excuse to delay payments but that it was abundantly shown there that the labourers fully appreciated regular payment when they can get it. Besides, he made it clear that there was nothing in the Ordinance which rendered the offer or the acceptance of monthly payment compulsory, and that the self-acting clause would have any practical meaning only if the labourers themselves desired to have their balance of wages paid monthly. Gordon questioned the propriety of retaining the wages of the labourers as a security for the advances made to the kanganies to recruit labour. He condemned the practice as "inequitable " and something which could be grieviously abused. Finally, while admitting that the introduction of the system of monthly payment and the self-acting clause would cause feelings of irritation among the planters, Gordon argued that it would be so only at the inception of the new system and that the question should be viewed from a long term perspective as a permanent solution to the problems of the labourers and the planters. He wrote

> In a few years that irritation would be forgotten and the benefits of a system of prompt payment to both employer and employed, fully recognised; while, though acquiescence in the wishes of the planters might produce temporary satisfaction, the checks which it would be them necessary to maintain, and re-institute, would keep up a perpetual friction and soreness far more injurious, in the long run, than any temporary discontent.74

In his views Gordon was strongly supported by the Colonial Office and the local Executive Council.[75] When it was clear that the draft had received the consent of the Colonial Office and the support of the senior officials in the colony, the planting representative in the Legislative Council made a last bid to obtain some concessions. He offered to support

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74. Gov. to S of S., No. 451 of 6 November 1888, C.O. 384/168.

75. S of S. to Gov., Coolie Emigration, 3 August 1888, ibid.
S of S. to Gov., Coolie Emigration, 29 January 1890, C.O. 384/172.

the bill, if Gordon was ready to amend the draft so as to extend the period at which the self-acting principle would become effective from 30 to 60 days.[76] Though reluctantly, Gordon conceded in the hope that it would create a better atmosphere for the new Ordinance to be implemented. Once the planters obtained the above concession and the bill reached London, the planters revived their agitation in London to get the self-acting clause revoked before the bill received royal assent.[77] These attempts, however, ended in failure and the bill as passed by the Legislative Counci was approved in London as Ordinance No. 7 of 1890.[78]

However, the extention of the "grace period" to 60 days in effect amounted to quarterly payment, for a labourer could quit without giving notice only if one month's wages were not paid within the succeeding 60 days, that is, for instance if the wages for January were not paid by the end of March. What of the actual practice among the planters in the years after 1890?. Gordon conceded to the planters' request in the belief that it would eventually lead to monthly payment. He thought that the employers would pay the first month's wages of the labourer at the end of the labourer's third month in service and would thereafter pay monthly always retaining two months' wages.[79] But most planters did not follow this method. Instead they paid once in three months for the entire three months. Thus, it boiled down to quarterly payment. It was, however, an improvement on the pre-1890 practice among the planters of paying four times a year retaining three months' balance of wages.

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76. Gov. to S of S., No. 142 of 6 May 1890, C.O. 384/176.

77. G. Kelly and T. N. Christie to Sec. of Ceylon Association in London, 22 May 1890, PPAC 1891, Correspondence, pp. xxv-xxvii.
Sec. of Ceylon Association in London to S of S., 7 July 1890, ibid., pp. xxiii-xxiv.

78. S of S. to Gov., Coolie Emigration, 4 July 1890, C.O. 384/176.
S of S. to Gov., Coolie Emigration, 27 June 1890, ibid.
For the Ordinance, see PPAC 1891, pp. xxvii-xxviii.

79. CH 1889-1890, 1 May 1890, p. 168.
Gov. to S of S., No. 142 of 6 May 1890, C.O. 384/176.

As the tea period progressed, the attitude of the planters to the method of infrequent payment of the balance of wages seems to have undergone a significant change. They moved towards more frequent payment of balance of wages.[80] But this move was slow and gradual, and did not show a direct switch over to either bi-monthly or monthly payment. Throughout the 1890s, the majority of the planters still appeared to have paid quarterly though the method of bi-monthly payment was on the increase. However, where such bi-monthly payments were made, it was done with one or two months' wages in arrears.[81] On the other hand, evidence reveals that by 1908 this practice was widespread. During the first decade of the present century, several planters were even advocating monthly payment. The evidence of the planting witnesses who appeared before the Labour Commission of 1908 reveals that the great majority of them were in favour of monthly or bi-monthly payment of balance of wages without arrears.[82] The period from 1890 to 1908 also saw the transition from indirect payment of the balance of wages of the labourers through the kanganies to direct payment into the hands of the labourers.[83]

The gradual nature of the change of attitude is a reflection of the desire of the planters to maintain a hold over the labour force and thwart the risk of losing labour at heavy crop times and also the desire to have some security for out-going coast advances. Like in case of the coffee planters of earlier times, these factors influenced the tea planters of the 1890s as well.[84] But the persuasiveness of these factors on the planters in their method of payment gradually waned during the tea period.

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80. A general meeting of Maskeliya DPA, 29 January 1902, COW, 31 January 1902. A general meeting of Ambagamuwa DPA, 16 May 1902, ibid., 20 May 1902.

81. AnR of Dikoya DPA, ibid, 3 January 1896. See also, AnRs of other DPAs in ibid., in January and February 1896.

82. Cey. Lab. Com. 1908, Proceedings.

83. Annual general meeting of PAC, 17 February 1904, Resolution, YPAC, 1903-1904, p. 67.

84. Editorial, COO, 7 June 1890.

Several explanations can be given for the drift of the planters towards more frequent payment of balance of wages in the tea period. The 1890s saw the formation of large-scale tea companies backed by substantial working capital from British banking houses.[85] Besides, unlike in the case of the coffee plantations, the tea estates turned out yield throughout the year and brought in continuous earnings to the tea planters. This enabled the tea planters to pay their labourers more frequently than the coffee planters did in the years prior to 1890.[86] While the underlying factor for frequent payment was the transition from coffee to tea and the greater access the tea planter had for working capital, it is important to realise that the immediate factor which encouraged the planters to move in favour of frequent and direct payment was the effect of infrequent payment in increasing the "outside debt" of the labourers and the disturbing influence it had on the labour force.[87]

In the period from 1890 to 1910, the "outside debt" became a serious problem to the planters. Once in debt to the "outside" creditor, the latter pressed the kangany to obtain fresh advances from the planter in order to recover his debt or manoeuvred to move the gang in search of higher advances. Thus, the planters saw in the method of infrequent and indirect payment an important reason for the heavy "outside" indebtedness of the labourers and the high turnover of the labour force--factors which contributed to increase the rates of cash advances paid out by the estates. Therefore, the planters found it in their interest to undermine the credit of the labourers at the bazaar and weakened the shop-keeper's hold over the labourers. The planters believed that this could be accomplished by making the balance of wages available

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85. N. Ramachandran, 1963, pp. 4ff.
Elaine Gunewardena, 1965, p. 25.

86. L. R. Jayawardena, unpublished dissertation for research fellowship, Cambridge, 1960, pp. 27-32.

87. Fifty-fourth AnR of PAC, PPAC 1907, p. 99.

to the labourers more frequently so as to avoid the accumulation of the labourers' debt with the shop-keeper on provisions purchased by the labourers. One could discern that the planters' desire to pay more frequently increased in inverse correlation to the rise of the indebtedness of the labourers and the rise in the rates of advances paid by the planters. In 1907 when labour was scarce and the rates of advances and the "outside debts" of the labourers were very high, the planters' opinion moved fast towards the adoption of the system of monthly payment. In recommending monthly payment, the Labour Commission of 1908 was, in fact, recommending the general consensus of views of the planting community; and the Ordinance No. 9 of 1909 embodying monthly payment was passed with the support of the planters.[88]

However, the planters' object was not realised. The labourers' indebtedness to the shop-keeper increased in spite of the adoption of the system of monthly payment of the balance of wages into the hands of the labourers. Nor did the frequency of payment help to reduce the rates of advances paid by the planters. In fact labour indebtedness and the high rates of estate advances continued to remain as the major problem in the plantation labour system in the Island in the post-1908 period.[89] The main reason for this was the persistence of the system of estate advances. We saw that under the system of infrequent payment of wages, the back-pay which remained with the employer was regarded as a security by the shop-keepers and the money-lenders in giving credit to the labourers. This was particularly so during the period up to 1890. During this early period the shop-keepers took care to limit their credit to the labourers to the amount of back-pay which accumulated with the employer. In the years after 1890 while frequent payment of the balance

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88. Cey. Lab. Com. 1908, Proceedings.

89. Report on Indian Labour Emigration to Ceylon, 1917, para, 18.

of wages removed the dependence on the back-pay as a source of security, the widespread offer of local cash advances by the estates turned out to be the new source of security for the labourers' outside creditors. As a result the bazaar credit to the labourers continued in spite of the adoption of the system of monthly payment by the planters in 1908 and it contributed to swell the labourers' total indebtedness.

4. The balance of wages and the cost of living

The object of this section is to find out how the wages paid to the immigrant plantation labourers in Ceylon compared with their cost of living. In doing so we have deviated from the practice common among the economists of comparing the total earnings with the consumer price index. Instead the method followed below is to find out, at the outset, the net balance of wages actually handed over to the labourers after making the necessary deductions for the goods and services supplied to them by the estate. Thereafter, an attempt will be made to compare the balance of wages with the cost of the requirements of the labourers other than what the estate supplied them. This course was adopted because without the knowledge of the balance of wages of the labourers it was found extremely difficult to know the amount of one of the major items of deductions made by the estate from the wages of the labourers--namely, deduction against the labourers' advances account. The only reliable information in this respect is that usually one month's balance of wages was debited against the advances account in every two months.[90] On this basis we have worked on the principle that the annual average deductions against the labourers' advances account would have approximated half the total average annual balance of wages of the labourers and that the annual cash receipts of the labourers would have therefore been the balance of wages of six months in the year.

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90. Cey. Lab. Com. 1908, Report, p. viii.

Our attention will be now focussed on the adequacy of the balance of wages to meet the cost of the requirements of the labourers other than rice and the services of the "dhoby and barber" which were provided by the estate.[91] In this respect it is necessary for us to look into the requirements of an average labourer and the cost of his requirements in the years 1880-1910. The immigrant labourers generally lived in joint-family units. It is difficult to obtain reliable and typical data on the family budget of the average plantation labour family. The variation in the size of the family, the number and the age of wage-earners, the number and age of dependents create further complexities. Therefore, we shall take the adult male and female labourer as the units of our study. This method of study seems acceptable in the light of the fact that approximately 80 per cent of the immigrant plantation labour population consisted of adults. Even in case of adults it is difficult to know the goods and services actually consumed by them. However, we are in a position to find out what items were considered desirable for an average estate labourer. These may or may not be identical with what the labourers actually consumed. It is our intention to use the information in our possession regarding the desirable requirements of an average labourer as the basis in our effort to find out the standard of living of the labourers.

Detailed information on the monthly requirements of the average male and female adults are found in accounts given by several planters towards the latter years of our period of study.[92] However, the first systematic and dependable survey of the basic requirements of the estate

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91. The washing of labourers' clothes and cutting their hair was organised by the estates and the estates deducted the cost of these services from the wages of the labourers.

92. Cey. Lab. Com. 1908, Appendix C, pp. 610-611.
Ibid., Appendix D, p. 612.
Ibid., Appendix E, p. 613.

labourers was carried out at a much later time, in 1923. These investigations were sponsored by the Government of Ceylon and carried out by the Assistant Director of Ceylon Census and Statistics, R. Jones-Bateman. However, the actual initiative for these investigations came from the Government of India which for several years repeatedly emphasised the need to investigate into the minimum rates of wages required by the immigrant plantation workers in Ceylon.[93] Bateman's investigation were fairly comprehensive. His findings were published in the form of a Ceylon Government Sessional Paper entitled "The Report on an enquiry into the relation between the wages and the cost of living of estate labourers, April-May 1923."[94] The Government of India while accepting Bateman's findings on the requirements of an average labourer as far as his findings went criticised Bateman as having erred on the side of omission.[95] Based on Bateman's conclusions and the criticism of the Indian Government we have compiled column 1 of Table 5.3 on the approximate basic requirements of an average labourer in 1923. Our next problem is to know how far the consumption pattern of an average estate worker of the early 1920s differed from that of an estate worker in the period 1880-1910. Fortunately, in this respect some useful information pertaining to our period is available in the accounts of several contemporary planters. The information given by these planters on the basic requirements of the labourers during our period of study compares very favourably with the list given in Table 5.3.

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93. Under Secretary of State for India to Under S of S., C.O., 19 June 1919, C.O. 54/824.
Sec. to Government of India to Col. Sec., Ceylon, 1 July 1922, enclosure, C.O. 54/856.

94. Cey. SP. XXXI of 1923.

95. Officiating Deputy Secretary to the Government of India to Col. Sec., Ceylon, No. 511 of 9 July 1924.

TABLE 5.3 The monthly cost of living (other than cost of rice, "dhoby and barber", and deductions against the advances account) of an average male estate woker in the up-country planting districts

Requirements of an average male worker per month (1)		Cost of requirements (2)						
		1886	1887	1888	1891	1892	1893	1907
Part I. Subsidiary food-stuffs								
Salt	1¼ measure	.13	.13	.15	.15	.15	.17	.15
Dal	1 measure	.10½	.10½	.12	.12	.13	.13½	.34
Green peas	1 measure	.11½	.10½	.10½	.10½	.14	.15	
Coriander	¼ measure	.02½	.02½	.02½	.03	.03	.03	.03½
Maldive fish	1 lb.	.18	.17½	.18	.21	.30	.28	.42
Dry fish	1 lb.	.10½	.10	.10½	.12	.13½	.13	.18
Dry chillies	¾ lb.	.09	.08	.09	.09	.11½	.22	.13½
Tamarind	1¼ lb.	.05½	.05½	.05½	.06	.06	.07	.09
Red onions	1 lb.	.03	.04	.04	.06	.07½	.09	12½
Mustard and pepper etc.		.03	.03	.03	.03	.04	.05	.06
Total cost of subsidiary food-stuffs		.86½	.84½	.90	.97½	1.17½	1.32½	1.53½
Part II. Other items								
Betel		.12	.12	.12	.14	.15	.19½	.25
Clothing		.35	.35	.35	.40	.41	.55	.65
Household goods		.23	.23	.23	.26	.31½	.35	.40
Total cost of other items		.70	.70	.70	.80	.87½	1.09½	1.30
Part III								
Average monthly expenditure		1.56½	1.54½	1.60	1.77½	2.05	2.42	2.83½
Minus income from bartering rice		.57	.57	.57	.65	.78	.88	1.00
Monthly expenditure to pay in cash		1.00	.98	1.03	1.12	1.27	1.54	1.83
Annual expenditure to pay in cash		12.00	12.00	12.25	13.50	15.25	18.50	22.00

Our next task is to find out the retail market price in the period 1880-1910 of those articles which were generally consumed by the plantation workers. Information on the movement of prices of consumer goods in the planting districts is not available for the entire period. Some information is available for the years 1886-8 and 1891-3 in the evidence placed before the Ceylon Silver Currency Commission of 1893 by several up-country shop-keepers regarding the prices in their shops.[96] These shops catered exclusively to the estate population. Information on the retail price of consumer goods of the estate worker is also available for the years 1907.[97] On the basis of this series of information, part 1 of Table 5.3 below sets out the expenses incurred by an average estate labourer on his subsidiary food-stuff in the years 1886-8, 1891-3, and 1907. For the years 1906 and 1908 the average total expenditure on subsidiary food-stuffs of an adult labourer has been estimated by several planters. It is important that these totals given by them tally with our total for 1907, the year for which detailed breakdown of prices of consumer goods is available.[98] Information is very thin on the cost of the other items of consumption set out in part 11 of the Table, viz., betel, clothes, and household goods in the labourers budget. On these articles details are available only for the year 1907.[99] With this information as the base we have attempted to improvise for the rest of the years making due allowance for the change in the cost of living. For this purpose we have taken the movement in the prices of subsidiary food-stuffs set out in part 1 of the Table as the criterion.

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96. SCC, Report, Cey. SP VI of 1894, pp. D23-D24. The shop-keepers were Indian Chetties whose shops were in the heart of the plantation area- in Dimbulla, Devon, Craig Lee, Tilli Coultry, and Talawakelle.

97. Cey Lab. Com. 1908, Appendix C, pp. 610-611.

98. Our Table compares favourably with that of K. Thiargaraja, an Indian observer who visited the plantations in Ceylon in 1917 and compiled a Table on the cost of living of the labourers.
K. Thiargaraja, 1917, pp. 182-183.

99. Cey. Lab. Com. 1908, Appendix C, p. 611.

From the total expenses of a labourer on the items in Table 5.3 we have deducted a certain amount as a set-off against the labourers "excess rice" which he bartered with the shop-keeper in return for subsidiary food-stuffs. Here again, it is not possible for us to arrive at anything more than a rough approximation of the value the labourers obtained in return. We could, however, work on several premises. It was widely held that an adult estate labourer normally consumed approximately three quarter bushel of rice per month which left him with a quarter bushel every month for the purpose of barter.[100] The rice purchased by the shop-keeper found its way back to the estate. Thus the shop-keeper's price for rice bartered by the labourers should have fallen short of the cost price of rice to the estates. Besides, we have already seen that the practice of bartering rice with the shop-keeper was often to the disadvantage of the labourer.[101] It was generally held that in the bartering of goods with the labourers the shop-keeper rated heavy interests usually varying anything between 20-25 per cent.[102] When we apply these premises to the year 1907 it is possible to conclude that the maximum value the labourers could have obtained by bartering a quarter bushel of rice could not have exceeded Re.1.[103] With Re.1 as the base, we have improvised for the rest of the years on the basis of the movement of prices of subsidiary food-stuffs in the up-country planting districts.

Table 5.3 presents the annual cost of articles of consumption, other than rice, of an average adult male in the up-country planting districts. It is now hoped to get some idea of the annual cost of these

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100. Notes and Comments, COO, 2 October 1894.
Sub-editorial, COW, 12 April 1907.

101. See above, p. 216.

102. 'The Labour Question', by N. Thomson, COW, 12 April 1907.

103. This conclusion is at least partly confirmed by the experience of a planter who found that the labourers appreciated his method of giving Re.1 instead of the weekly issue of rice, either once or twice a month.
Cey. Lab. Com. 1908, Appendix H, p. 614.

articles for average adult male and female workers in the three main planting regions of low, mid, and up-country districts. Here, we are beset with two problems. First, the lack of any detailed information on the extent of consumption of the items in Table 5.3 by female estate workers. To overcome this problem we have taken as the basis of our calculations, the generally accepted view at the time on the desirable difference between male and female workers with regard to the quantity of rice issued by the estate and also in respect of the rates of wages paid to these two groups of workers. The rate of pay as well as the quantity of rice issued to a female estate worker fell by a quarter of what was given to a male worker (pay 33 cents for male and 25 cents for female worker per day; rice at one bushel for male and three quarter bushel for female worker per month respectively). Apparently, the proportionate requisites of a female worker was generally accepted as being three quarter of that of a male worker.

Our second problem is that our findings set out in Table 5.3 on the cost of living of the estate workers relate only to up-country planting districts. We are confronted with the question of finding the regional differences in the cost of the labourers' requirements given in Table 5.3. Here, we have relied mainly on the basis adopted in 1927 by the Ceylon Government in agreement with the Indian Government in enacting the pioneer piece of legislation in Ceylon regarding the minimum rates of wages to be paid to the immigrant estate workers in the Island. This legislation embodied in Ordinance No. 27 of that year enacted that rice should be supplied by the estates to the workers irrespective of the location of the estate at a fixed price of Rs.6.40 cents per bushel and that workers should be paid daily wage rates of 50, 52, and 54 cents in the estates situated in low, mid, and up-country respectively.[104] Since rice was supplied at a uniform price, the difference in the regional rates

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104. CGG, No. 7676 of 30 November 1928.

of daily wages were actually meant to cover the regional difference in the cost of living of the labourers other than the cost of rice. On the basis of these wage differentials the regional differences in the cost of living other than the cost of rice works out to a ratio of 11: 10: 9 among up, mid, and low-country planting districts respectively.[105]

Table 5.4 attempts to compare the annual cost of living other than rice of the labourers in the low, mid, and up-country planting districts with the annual balance of wages handed over to them by the estates. It is clear from Table 5.4 that in the years after early 1890s, the balance of wages of the labourers were hardly sufficient to meet the cost of their basic consumer items which were not supplied to them by the estate.

We have so far seen that wages turned out to be inadequate with the progress of the tea period. Whereas our conclusions on the earnings of the labourers are based on fairly acceptable data, our analysis of the cost of living of the labourers is based on imperfect material. But these are the only data available to us directly pertaining to the cost of living of the labourers. In view of the fragmentary nature of these data on which we have based our conclusions we now hope to substantiate these conclusions with three general arguments.

First, the Colombo wholesale market price of those food-stuffs generally consumed by the estate labourers are available to us. The movement of these prices show an upward trend particularly during the last decade of our period.[106] Secondly, the district hospitals in the planting districts, which almost exclusively treated the sick estate labourers, maintained records on expenses these hospitals incurred on feeding the

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105. This ratio is calculated on the basis that an average labourer worked 20 days in the month. This is the most acceptable average.

106. See Appendix D.

TABLE 5.4 The balance of wages of the male and female immigrant estate labourers (after debiting against rice, "dhoby and barber", and deduction against advances account) and their cost of living (other than cost of rice, "dhoby and barber") (in rupees and cents)

Planting region	Average annual balance of wages in the years		The annual cost of living of labourers other than cost of rice, "dhoby and barber" in the years					
	1886-93	1907	1886-7	1888	1891	1892	1893	1907
Up-country								
Males	15.25	13.00	12.00	12.25	13.50	15.25	18.50	22.00
Females	13.00	11.25	9.00	9.25	10.25	11.50	14.00	16.50
Mid-country								
Males	13.50	12.50	11.00	11.25	12.00	14.00	17.00	20.00
Females	10.50	10.25	8.00	8.50	9.25	10.50	12.50	15.00
Low-country								
Males	14.00	12.75	10.00	10.25	11.00	12.50	15.00	18.00
Females	9.25	10.50	7.00	7.50	8.25	9.50	11.25	13.50

inmates of the hospitals, the number of labourers treated annually, and the annual number of days the labourers stayed in the hospitals. The statistics on the number of days on which the labourers were treated in the hospitals can be reckoned as fairly correct because the hospital treatment of the labourers was a source of revenue to the medical scheme. The estates were charged with a daily fee for each labourer hospitalized. In the period, particularly from 1890 to 1910, the hospital menu underwent little change. It is not possible to know how far the data on hospital expenses on the food items of the inmates are accurate. But the irregularities could have been common to the entire period. The average annual cost incurred by the hospitals in the different districts on feeding per sick labourer per day can be taken as a general guide of the movement of prices of food items in the various districts. Such average cost show a consistent upward trend, particularly after about 1895.[107] Finally, it is significant that towards the end of our period the planters themselves began to debate the question whether an increase in the wage rates paid to the estate labourers was necessary. At least a minority of planters in the tea period began to point out that the wages of the labourers were inadequate and that these should be raised.[108] This minority opinion seems to have slowly gained ground, especially in the years 1904-10. The Labour Commission of 1908 examined the question and finally emerged with the majority version of the planters that the wage rates were adequate provided rice was supplied at a reasonable price. The dissent of one of the members of the Commission, himself a planter, on the majority verdict is symbolic of the minority thinking among the planters on the subject of the adequacy of the wages. It is important that such opinion should have gained ground at all at a time when the planters as a body were striving to maintain the static wage rates.

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107. AR of PCMO, (annual series, 1884-1910), CAR.

108. 'Coolies: Their Earnings, Savings and Remittances', by G.D., COO, 17 June 1890.
Cey. Lab. Com. 1908, Rider by C. C. Mee, p. xxii.

It should be noted that in computing the cost of living of the labourers as given in Table 5.3 we have omitted several important financial encumbrances of the labourers. There were the dependents of the labourers to be cared for, particularly children under 10 years of age and the old and the infirm.[109] Among the immigrant plantation workers the proportion of the dependents to the total working population was relatively low. This was largely due to the migratory nature of the labour force. At the census of 1901 it was estimated that the number of dependents consisted only about 14 per cent of the total estate population. Besides, the needs of the dependents would have been minimal. Nevertheless, it is inevitable that the dependents should have brought about some increase in the family budget. Evidence reveals that the labourers did engage in petty luxuries such as gambling and consumption of alcohol. The Labour Commission of 1908 found that these practices were frequently indulged in by the immigrant labourers, more especially after their pay day.[110] In particular, the consumption of alcohol was found to be excessive among the labourers, so as to seriously affect the efficiency of the labour force at least in certain planting districts. The spread of drunkedness among the labourers was a common complaint of the District Planters' Associations. The workers also did manage to remit some of their earnings to South India. With the limited information at our disposal it is impossible for us to obtain any idea of the volume of remittance made by the estate labourers. The annual Administration Reports of the Post Master General of Ceylon furnish information on the total amount of money remitted to India from the various Post Offices situated in the planting districts of the Island. These totals include money remitted by the planters as "coast advances" and money sent by the kanganies and also

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109. DHMC, Cey. SP II of 1893, p. 21.

110. Cey. Lab. Com. 1908, p. xi.

by the Chetties trading in the planting districts.[111] Therefore, it is impossible to identify the remittances of the estate workers. However, there is sufficient evidence to believe that the estate workers did utilize the Money Order System to remit money to their villages. Besides, information reveals that the labourers returning to South India carried money and jewellery in their person.[112] Other financial commitments of the labourers included payment of interest to the shop-keepers, and expenses on religous and social festivals, particularly "Deepavali" celebrated through out the planting districts by the immigrant plantation workers.[113]

How did the labourers live under conditions of barely adequate balance of wages and yet met their other financial commitments?. One explanation is the existence of the joint-family system among the immigrant estate population in Ceylon. A joint-family unit consisted of not only the parents and their children but also the close relatives. Most of the members were wage earners. Children above 10 years of age found employment on the estate, particularly as weeders. The desire of the relatives to live together is clear from the available evidence. The planters found in the grouping of relatives a factor contributing to maintain the stability of the labour force. At times tundus were demanded by the labourers to move out to other estates with the aim of joining their relatives. Incidence of polygamy as a means to increase the wage earning capacity of the family are on record. The Labour Commission of 1908 found evidence to point out that "the earnings of the members of a family group are

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111. 'Coolies: Their Earnings, Savings and Remittances' by G. D, COO, 17 June 1890.

112. Editorial, ibid., 10 June 1890.

113. Coast Advances, Debts, Mortality of Feverish Estates. A Black Picture' by an Old Planter, COO, 24 May 1894.
The Labour Question, by G. A. Talbot, ibid., 4 January 1896.

held, in some sort, in common." While the joint-family tended to increase the earnings of the family, on the other hand, it also helped to curtail their expenses particularly in regards to household goods and subsidiary food-stuffs.[115]

However, the main reason for the immigrant's endurance of inadequate wages can be attributed to the working of the advances system. While some of the financial contigencies of the labourers were partly met by the balance of wages, it was the cash advances which sustained the labourers where the balance of wages were inadequate. Though some portion of the balance of wages was taken in by the kangany to settle the "outside debts" of the gang, a total wipe out of these debts were possible only by obtaining cash advances from the employer or by transfering the gang to another employer on a tundu. Where the labourers required money for eventualities such as festivals or for remittance to South India they made demands on the kanganies. The kanganies in turn obtained advances from the employers or the money-lenders. If due to a continuous long spell of surplus labour the advances would not be forthcoming to meet the labourers' financial commitments, discontent among the labourers would become widespread. A portion of the outstanding advances would be worked off by the labourers. But eventually the "outside debt" had to be taken over by planters in order to retain the labour gangs or to procure fresh gangs. As a leading planter pointed out

> ... what they now owe us, represents chiefly debt contracted with the cadday-keeper and money-lender originally and which we have had to takeover... our so-called coast advances represent money given out by us to settle debts originally contracted in the bazaar.[116]

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114. Cey. Lab. Com. 1908, Report, p. xi.

115. Ibid., Proceedings, p. 83.

116. Annual general meeting of PAC, 17 February 1904, PPAC 1903-1904, pp. 75-76.

If, as we have seen, the bulk of the advances given out to the immigrant labourers by the estates were irrecoverable, the question follows as to why the planters did continue the practice of giving out heavy advances. The following extract from the dissenting note submitted by C. C. Mee, a member of the Labour Commission of 1908 and one of the few planters of the day with a critical approach to the labour problems, provides the answer. Mee wrote "... it is a safeguard in many cases to have highly indebted coolies, because they cannot then leave an estate so easily (unless they give notice), or play up for higher advances at critical times...."[117] In the coffee period, infrequent payment of the balance of wages provided the planter with a hold over his labour force. Then, the desire of the planters was to bind the labourers to the estate during the few months to which the coffee crop was confined. In the tea period when the crop was almost perennial, the planter was anxious to keep the labourer tied down to the estate throughout the year. The period also witnessed a move towards frequent payment of wages. Consequently, the planters found in the offer of advances and the consequent indebtedness of the labourers the only practical method of maintaining a hold over the labourers. Though the entire amount of the outstanding advances were irrecoverable, such advances gave the planter some sort of a negotiable security. He could either have the gang of labourers or if the gang moved out, he could recover the total debt of the gang, which he could utilize to engage another gang.

Thus, while the system of cash advances met a part of the cost of living of the labourers, simultaneously it tied down the labourers in debt-bondage to the estate. The labourer, as we have pointed out earlier on, having lived on advances and indebtedness in his own village in South India, acquiesced to the debt-servitude on the estate.

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117. Cey. Lab. Com. 1908, Rider by C. C. Mee, p. xxii.
See also, Editorial, CCO, 29 May 1890.
The Labour Question. Report of the special Committee of PAC, Memoranda Re. Labour Question, PPAC 1902-1903, p. 7.

CHAPTER VI

HEALTH AND LEVEL OF LIVING OF THE IMMIGRANT PLANTATION LABOURERS

We have seen in the preceding chapter that poverty and indebtedness were common denominators among the plantation labour population. These together with widespread ill-health and illiteracy contributed to perpetuate a low standard of living among them. In section 1 of the present chapter we will look into the available data on the general state of health of the plantation labour community. It can be said generally that the health of the community was appalling and that over the period of our study there was no striking progress in the overall standard of health. In section 2 we will examine the basic causes of the general state of ill-health. These basic factors were again related to the method of labour recruitment, hours of work, and insanitary living conditions, as much to the prejudices, ignorance, and illiteracy of the labourers themselves--the latter being the factors on which the planters laid most stress in explaining the general state of ill-health. While the widespread state of ill-health and the low level of living obviously had distressing effect on the labour life on the estates it also contributed to bring about a certain degree of inefficiency in the plantation work force.

1. Indices on the general state of health of the immigrant plantation labourers

The present section contains several indices which will help us to grasp the general state of health of the immigrant labourers. Table 6.1 shows the death rates of the immigrant estate labourers and the other communities (given in the Hospital Returns as "mixed races") in the hospitals situated in the plantation districts. The Table reveals

that the hospital mortality rates of the immigrant labourers were heavy. Hospital death rates are certainly not correct criteria to compare the incidence of mortality among the immigrant labourers and the rest of the population. Whereas a large number of death among the labourers took place in the hospitals, in case of other races a fewer absolute number of deaths occurred in the hospitals. However, a Table on the hospital death rates is included in the present section for two reasons. First, these are the most accurate available statistics on the death rates in the Island in our period. It is not possible to obtain annual series of statistics on the crude death rate among the immigrant labourers with a reasonable degree of accuracy. Annual series of statistics on the size of the estate labour population during our period are not available. It is also not possible to procure correct statistics on the number of deaths which occurred outside the hospitals. In the case of Hospital Returns, fairly correct statistics were maintained, partly because the admission of sick labourers to the hospitals was a source of revenue to the hospital scheme. Secondly, what is more important to our study is that the Table unmistakebly shows that there was no significant improvement in the hospital death rate of the immigrant labourers throughout our period.

Table 6.2 shows that the majority of deaths among the estate labourers were due to diarrhoea, dysentery, and debility. Death due to anchylostomiases shows an upward trend towards the end of our period. This was largely due to defective compilation of statistics during the earlier years when medical men failed to diagonise anchylostomiases from malarial cachexia and therefore attributed a large number of death by the former disease to the latter. The causes of death seen in Table 6.2 is a useful criterion of the health of the labour population. It distinctly illustrates that the principal causes of death among the labourers were preventible diseases--"diseases of poverty".[1]

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1. Vera Anstey, 1939, p. 68.

TABLE 6.1 Hospital mortality rates of the estate labourers and "mixed races" in the planting districts, 1883-1910 (per 100 of admissions of each category)

Year	Estate labourers	Mixed races	Year	Estate labourers	Mixed races
1883	12.08	6.68	1897	20.83	6.04
1884	21.05	7.30	1898	23.34	6.08
1885	22.27	9.93	1899	22.98	6.54
1886	19.70	8.16	1900	23.29	6.39
1887	18.70	8.28	1901	29.33	6.07
1888	21.97	8.49	1902	22.28	5.50
1889	22.18	8.53	1903	19.86	5.91
1890	22.15	6.79	1904	17.79	5.75
1891	23.35	7.10	1905	19.52	5.97
1892	30.30	7.49	1906	24.88	7.23
1893	27.67	8.98	1907	24.49	7.17
1894	21.49	6.06	1908	21.88	7.38
1895	22.46	7.25	1909	21.05	7.99
1896	19.64	7.76	1910	20.66	8.00

Sources: ARs of PCMO, (annual series, 1883-1893), CAR.
Hospital Returns, (annual series, 1894-1910), Cey. BB.

Tables 6.2 and 6.3 are compiled from the information available in the annual Administration Reports of the Registrar-General, on Vital Statistics. These statistics are not as accurate as the statistics in the Hospital Returns which form the basis of Table 6.1. This was largely because the collection of data from the estates on the number of deaths and their causes was defective. But the Vital Statistics throw valuable light on the general trends of the causes of death among the estate labour population and the rates of infant mortality on the estates. The errors in the Vital Statistics may have occurred mainly by way of omissions.

TABLE 6.2 Principal causes of death among the immigrant plantation workers, 1894-1910 (per 100 of deaths)

Year	Diarrhoea and dysentery	General dropsy and debility	Fevers	Anchlos-tomiases	Bronchitis and pneumonia
1894	38	17	7	3	8
1895	36	16	7	3	10
1896	38	17	5	2	9
1897	36	20	6	2	6
1898	40	20	6	1	6
1899	42	20	6	1	6
1900	38	19	7	1	8
1901	47	19	6	1	6
1902	38	22	6	1	7
1903	33	34	5	1	8
1904	25	26	4	2	9
1905	34	29	5	3	10
1906	39	20	6	3	8
1907	40	21	4	4	7
1908	35	19	4	5	9
1909	35	15	3	7	11
1910	32	16	3	7	10

Source: AR of Registrar-General, on Vital Statistics, (annual series, 1894-1910), CAR.

The heavy rates of mortality by the above indicated diseases are not accurate criteria of the general state of health among the estate population. But accurate data on the incidence rates of diseases are not available and therefore we have to depend mainly on the statistics pertaining to mortality rates to appraise the state of health. Diseases such as diarrhoea, dysentery, and anchylostomiases are not by themselves fatal diseases unless these diseases become acute. The high death rates from such diseases reveal a very high incidence of these diseases among the plantation labourers.

TABLE 6.3 Infant mortality rates among the estate labourers and the Sinhalese in the planting districts, 1887-1910 (deaths per 1000 births)

Year	Estate labourers	Sinhalese	Year	Estate labourers	Sinhalese
1887	248	176	1899	221	189
1888	188	164	1900	211	171
1889	212	163	1901	212	173
1890	209	155	1902	200	172
1891	194	167	1903	195	159
1892	229	165	1904	202	172
1893	229	171	1905	190	163
1894	186	162	1906	210	188
1895	218	172	1907	204	161
1896	213	146	1908	214	181
1897	201	132	1909	235	219
1898	240	169	1910	224	170

Source: AR of Registrar-General, on Vital Statistics, (annual series, 1887-1910), CAR.

What is basically relevant to us is that none of these indices reveal any striking progress in the overall state of health throughout our period. This was despite the medical welfare programme organised by the Government and the planters, the establishment of the Ragama Immigration Camp, and the closing of the North Road to immigrant traffic. The absence of a significant progress was fundamentally interwoven with the low socio-economic conditions and the poor living and working conditions which did not show any noticeable improvement in our period.

2. Genesis of ill-health among the immigrant workers

In the present section we will attempt to make an objective analysis of the factors which brought about a general state of ill-health among the plantation labour community. On the whole, the planters attributed this to factors such as labourers' insanitary habits, superstitious inhibitions, and privation. That these characteristics pervaded the life of the immigrant labour in Ceylon is undisputable as we will see below. These were the outcome of the ingrained social habits and customs, abject poverty, and the illiteracy of that stratum of the community in South India from which the immigrants were drawn. But this line of reasoning on the part of the planters leaves much to be desired, as a satisfactory explanation of the ill-health of the plantation labour population. On closer analysis it appears that some aspects of the plantation labour system, particularly factors such as long hours of work, the wage structure, bad housing, insanitary condition, and the lack of adequate welfare facilities on the plantations contributed towards the general ill-health of the labourers in a large measure.

The question, however, cannot be disassociated from the general state of health of the new arrivals who annually replenished the plantation labour community in the Island. Cholera and smallpox frequently broke out in South India in epidemic form. Besides, evidence suggests that the poorer classes of people in South India had a particularly low standard of health and that the incidence of diseases such as diarrhoea, dysentery, and anchylostomiases were high among them.[2] The available evidence is conflicting on the extent to which the new arrivals contributed to swell the death rate on plantations, but there is general agreement that on the whole the new arrivals were

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2. N. Gangulee, 1938, chap. IV.
Ira Klein, 1973, pp. 639, 643.
'Coolie emigration from the Madras Presidency to Ceylon', IPP., Vol. 692, Pro. No. 24 of January 1873, p. 124.

physically in poor state of health, suffering from malnutrition.[3] In 1910, the Principal Civil Medical Officer, after an examination of the faeces of three shiploads of plantation labour immigrants in Colombo, reported that "...the results obtained from this inquiry proves that the immigrant cooly is seriously infected with intestinal parisites (particularly anchylostomiases) on his arrival in Ceylon."[4] The gradual improvement in the Ceylon Government quarantine arrangements helped to curtail the danger of frequent and large-scale introduction of plague, cholera, and smallpox.[5] But the quarantine measures failed to make the Island completely immune to these diseases. Besides, such measures could do little to avoid the introduction of other communicable diseases.

The diseases such as anchylostomiases were so widespread in South India that it was impossible to avoid the introduction of fresh batches of immigrants stricken with such diseases so long as South Indian labour was required on the plantations. Nevertheless, the system of recruitment of labour in some ways contributed towards the general state of ill-health of the labour force. The recruiting efforts of the kanganies were concentrated on the numerical strength of their gangs rather than the physical capacity and the ability of the recruits to perform manual labour. Migration itself was unrestricted. There was no selection of labourers in India. Particularly during the times of famines and epidemics in South India the immigrant labour population in the Island was swelled with refugees trying to escape from the hardships in their homeland. The medical examination of immigrants at Paumben and Tuticorin conducted by the Ceylon Government medical officers was of a desultory nature where estate labour immigrants were concerned. Where labourers arrived in Paumben or Tuticorin attached to a kangany's gang the usual practice

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3. DHMC, Proceedings, Cey. SP II of 1893, pp. 2-3, 9, 15.
4. PRPAC, Cey. SP XV of 1910, p. 27.
5. See above, pp. 66-76.

was to send them across without too much checking. The ordinary passengers travelling from Tuticorin to Colombo had to submit documentary evidence of good health and proof of having been away from an infected district during the previous fifteen days, in order to board the streamer. After an enquiry into the medical arrangement for the immigrants at Tuticorin a medical officer reported that

> ... no such precautions exist in the case of estate labourers. These can obtain tickets without any reference to the Port Medical Officer. ... to Colombo, on the bare statement of a kangany that they are estate coolies.... The passengers and the crew of a ship are examined by the Medical Officer before leaving Tuticorin. This examination is a hurried one, as over one hundred and fifty deck passengers have to be examined in about an hour. This is the only examination that the so-called cooly emigrant has to undergo.[6]

Further, the important system of family recruitment made it impossible to prevent the dependents of the recruits entering the Island irrespective of their general physical condition. It was a common practice for the immigrant labourers to bring with them their aged and infirm relatives, whose presence they desired and whom it was their custom to support.[7] The planters were of the view that any action which might restrict or put a stop to this practice would keep a number of the prospective immigrants from coming to work on the estates and that it would also disturb the system of recruitment of families. Until the closing of the North Road in 1899, the long march on the route also contributed to aggravate the physical debility of the immigrants.

From the point of view of the general standard of health, the labour immigrants to Ceylon appear to have been less fortunate than the countries which recruited labourers under the indenture system. In the latter countries immigration was restricted, recruitment was confined to adult labourers, and the recruits were subjected to a fairly effective

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6. Gov. to S of S., No. 137 of 27 April 1897, enclosure, 'Report on the epidemic of plague in Bombay', by Dr. H. M. Fernando, C.O. 54/636.

7. Cey. Lab. Com. 1908, Report, p. xix.

medical examination prior to their embarkation from India. This procedure, at times, resulted in the rejection of those recruits who were found unfit for manual labour. Even Malaya, which like Ceylon, was allowed to import unindentured labourers after 1897, generally restricted its recruiting activities to adults and subjected the emigrants to a more effective medical examination at Negapatam than what the Ceylon medical officers performed at Paumben and Tuticorin. It is on record that the professional recruiters who were working in South India for the Malayan planters resorted to the practice of handing over to the Ceylon kanganies those of their recruits who were rejected at Negapatam on grounds of physical debility. The employers of Indian labourers in countries such as the West Indies, Mauritius, Fiji, and Malaya spent more money than the Ceylon planters did in order to import labour and therefore took greater interest about the type of labour they obtained.

The high percentage of death among the labourers working in the estates in Ceylon from bowel complaints as seen in Table 6.2 partly reflect their poor and unhealthy dietary habits. As Dr. Griffin pointed out, "The majority of diseases are those of the digestive organs pointing to defective feeding in some way."[8] It was generally accepted in our period that the diet of an average adult labourer should consist of rice, pulses, chillies, dry fish, and curry-stuff.[9] Such a diet lacked certain essential constituents of a satisfactory human diet, especially food containing sufficient quantity of animal proteins such as meat, fish, and milk. Moreover, the actual food consumed by an average labourer fell even below this generally desired diet of the labourers. They subsisted mainly on a rice diet supplemented with salt and some pulses such as peas and dal.[10] Even if barely sufficient in quantity, the average diet of the labourer

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8. DMIC, Proceedings, Cey. SP II of 1893, p. 45.

9. See above, pp. 245-246.

10. Gov. to S of S., No. 396 of 15 September 1882, enclosure, Report on high hospital mortality of Malabar coolies, by PCMO, C.O. 54/541.

was markedly deficient in quality. The most striking feature of the labourers' food habits was the excessive consumption of carbohydrates. The Principal Civil Medical Officer wrote that

> The majority of malabars admitted in 1881 as in previous years were suffering more from the effect of privation or incomplete nourishment from want of food or the consumption of food containing a deficient quality of albumen and fats, ... their bodies in consequence became poorer in these necessary constituents and richer in water, a state of anaemia being produced which predisposed to disease by diminishing the resistence power of the body.11

The poor diet could be partly attributed to privation. Besides, their food habits were a continuation of their past experience in India. It has been pointed out that the religious scruples and the social prejudices among the labourers of some castes prevented them from consuming beef. However, several of the lowest castes, who in fact formed the bulk of the labour force, had no inhibitions as regards any kind of flesh and if they did not consume meat it was mainly because they could not procure it with the means at their disposal. Basically, deficient diet was the natural outcome of two important factors. On the one hand, the inadequate wages obviously compelled the labourers to subsist at a bare minimum standard. On the other hand, poor diet was also the result of the mode of wage payment on the estate which tied the labourers in debt bondage to the kangany and the shopkeeper, for the labourers had to obtain their food-stuffs other than rice on credit. Inevitably the shopkeeper had an important say in the labourer's diet. The labourers, indebted to the Chetty tradesman, had invariably to obtain their requirements only from him.[12] In fact, one important obligation of a kangany for any debt contracted from the Chetty was to see that his gang of labourers purchased their provisions from the Chetty and no one else. The kangany had necessarily to contract debt from the Chetty because of the irregular system of wage payment of the estate. Besides, especially in case of estates situated in isolation from the

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11. Ibid.
DHMC, Proceedings, Cey. SP II of 1893, pp. 1, 9.

12. See above, pp. 221-222.

main towns, as most of the estates were, practically the only shop available in the vicinity of the estate was that of the Chetty. The monopolistic role of the Chetty in the supply of food-stuffs to the labourers enabled him to decide on the quality and the quantity of what he supplied to the labourers; and the Chetty on the whole charged exorbitant prices and was guilty of supplying poor quality and short measure goods. He had little or no regard to the well-being of the labourers and, in fact, sought to use the indebted labourers as pawns to wrest money from the estates in short supply of labour. A few planters experimented with estate shops in order to eliminate the unhealthy monopoly of the Chetty over the supply of food-stuffs to the labourers.[13] But these isolated efforts were not of much use in a general set-up where the Chetty could exercise his coercive power to put pressure on the kangany to get the latter's gang to patronize his shop.[14] However, on the whole, the planters were content with making arrangements only for the supply of rice to the labourers. Their mode of wage payment, in fact, reflect their general indifference to the dietary requirements of the labourers, other than rice.

One of the worst features of the dietary practices of the labourers was closely related to the hours of work on the plantations. The long working day which lasted normally from 6 a.m. to 4 p.m. without a meal break naturally had adverse effects on the physical condition of the workers. As Dr. Griffin, a medical practitioner of 18 years of experience among the labourers, pointed out

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13. Cey. Lab. Com. 1908, Report, p. xvi.

14. Ibid.
The merchants' monopolistic hold over the food supply of the labourers find parellel in India at that time. Thus, Burnett-Hurst wrote, "The grain merchant encourages the mill-hands to make his purchase from him on credit and even lends him money. Once he has secured his hold on his customer he proceeds to supply him with inferior and mixed grain and give him light measure. In fact every one takes advantage of the poverty and the lack of bargaining power of the worker." A. R. Burnett-Hurst, 1925, p. 64.

> Nine coolies out of ten on estates go nine hours without anything to eat.... I think that the long hours of work without food prevents a great many arrivals from India from developing into strong labourers. I do not think long hours--perhaps 10 or 11 hours--without food is likely to be anything but prejudicial to a cooly who arrives physically not in a strong state...15

Besides, because of the early morning muster and the absence of a mid-day meal break, the labourers normally ate in the morning a fairly heavy meal of cold rice prepared the night before--a meal not too suitable in a cold climate. A medical practitioner of fifteen years' experience among the plantation labourers pointed out that

> I consider that the eating of cold rice in the morning is most certainly objectionable, especially in this climate. Stale rice in the mornings is certainly very injurious to bowel complaints, or anything of that kind. The cooly in such a climate requires something stimulating in the mornings, in the shape of coffee or tea, as well as warm rice if he had the time to cook it.16

The planters and the kanganies were hesitant to give their labourers a mid-day meal break for fear that if the labour force was knocked off at mid-day there would be some difficulty in getting the labourers to return to work.[17] The fact that most kanganies and a few labourers did have their mid-day meal in the field suggests that the main reason for the great majority of the labourers to skip a mid-day meal was that they could not afford it.[18] This together with the fact that a meal break was not recognised in the system in that there was no cessation of work to enable the labourers to have a meal, inevitably, resulted in a "long fast." On the Assam tea plantation the problem of the labourers diet was tackled by setting up the "Hotel system" to provide a hot mid-day meal to the labourers. Though the system was suggested for Ceylon, it failed to find any support from the planters.

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15. DHMC, Proceedings, Cey. SP II of 1893, p. 45.

16. Ibid., p. 19.

17. Ibid., p. 45.
K. Thiargaraja, 1917, p. 183.

18. DHMC, Proceedings, Cey. SP II 1893, pp. 19, 45.

What of working conditions in the field?. The work of tea plucking was light and involved a relatively healthier outdoor life than in case of factory labourers in India in those days when most factories were ill-ventilated, badly lit, and congested with industrial dust and fumes. But outdoor life, particularly on plantations, meant that the impact of the climate on the health of the labourer, who spent practically his whole day in the field, had to be taken care of. The climate, particularly in the highlands where tea flourished, was cold and damp, and the region was subject to heavy monsoon rains in some months of the year even to the extent of precluding any field work. The annual temperature in most plantation districts fluctuated between 50 to 60 F. Field work in cold, damp, and windy weather naturally required adequate protection from exposure to such a weather. The climatic factor was particularly important in case of new arrivals who came from the hot and arid plains of South India and therefore had to face a considerable change in the climate.[19] Whatever available protection the labourer had from the weather was confined to a coarse cloth, known as a cumbly, used to cover the head and the body of the field worker. Most labourers could not afford more than a single cumbly which inevitably meant that in wet weather, the damp cumbly had to be worn every day of the working week without little or no drying.[20] This together with unprotected feet exposed the labourers to the vagaries of the weather.[21] While this factor contributed to aggravate the general state of ill-health among the labourers, it was particularly responsible for the considerable incidence of mortality from respiratory diseases such as pneumonia and bronchitis among the plantation labour community.

The condition of the housing provided by the employers was far from satisfactory for healthy human habitation. To migrant labourers

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19. Ibid., p. 1.

20. Ibid., p. 10.

21. Gov. to S of S., No. 264 of 19 June 1885, enclosure 3, PCMO to Col. Sec., No. 521 of 9 June 1885, C.O. 54/559.

recruited from a long distance dwellings had to be provided by the employer. These dwellings, which were usually known as "coolie lines", were provided to the labourers rent free. The usual plantation labour dwelling was a row of rooms each approximately 12 by 10 by 9 ft., opening into a long common verandah. Clusters of such "coolie lines" were situated at several spots in the plantations depending on the size of the plantations. In "line" construction little attention was paid to factors such as drainage, ventilation, and privacy. The lack of proper drainage contributed to create a filthy environment around the "coolie lines". The floor of the "lines", which the labourers used to sleep, was hardened with a mixture of mud and cowdung. This type of floor easily got damp in the wet climate of the tea plantation districts. This together with thatched roofs, and rooms without windows and doors (except a mere opening to enter the room) contributed to make the "coolie lines" a gloomy, dismal, and an unhealthy place as a human dwelling. The labourers often made the conditions of the "lines" still worse by enclosing the verandah in an attempt to create privacy for themselves.

Descriptive accounts of the conditions of the "coolie lines" are available for the years from 1883 to 1886 when a system of sanitary inspection of estates by the Superintending Medical Officers appointed by the Government was in existence.[22] They reported that in a great majority of "lines", scavenging, drainage, and roofs were neglected; that the sanitary conditions were bad, and that cattle were kept in the verandah. In a few cases it was found that the labourers actually lived in sheds meant for cattle. The improvements which the Superintending Medical Officers recommended were left in cold storage mainly because the depression in the plantation sector precluded the employers from undertaking additional financial commitments.[23] In the years after 1890,

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22. Gov. to S of S., No. 320 of 30 June 1883, enclosure, PCMO to Col. Sec., 20 June 1883, C.O. 54/547.

23. AR of PCMO, CAR 1885, p. 140D.

the rapid increase in the number of resident labour population and the revived prosperity in the plantation sector resulted in the extention of labour dwellings in the plantations. But there was little improvement in the quality of the dwellings. Particularly, those of the low-country planting districts were described as "a disgrace". It was only towards the very end of our period that a handful of planters began to experiment with tiled roofs and cemented floors.[24]

Defective sanitation was yet another bad feature of labour life on the plantations. There was no satisfactory system of sewage disposal on the estates. The labourers habitually defeacated on the surface of the soil; and the only facility provided by plantations, with very few exceptions, was to set apart a block of land in the vicinity of the "coolie lines" for the labourers to deposit their excreta. The estates employed scavangers to collect the human excrement from these allotments either daily or several times a week. In 1907, the Committee on the Sanitation of Estates, on inquiry, found that special arrangement for the collection and disposal of sewage was made only in one estate.[25]

The favourite explanation of the planters for not providing any form of sanitary latrines on the estates was the disinclination of the labourers to use them.[26] A few planters who experimented with latrines pointed out that the system had to be eventually dropped having proved unsuccessful with the labourers. The labourers were unacquinted with even the most elementary ideas of hygiene and sanitation, and therefore it was found difficult to wean them from the insanitary habits they were steeped in. Even when a block of land was demarcated, it was difficult to prevent the labourers defeacating all over the estate. This perhaps was partly unavoidable in a situation where the labourer,

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24. FPRPAC, Cey. SP XXXI of 1910, p. 11.

25. PRPAC, Cey. SP XV of 1910, p. 3.

26. FPRPAC, Anchylostomiases Committee, Proceedings, Cey. SP XXXI of 1910. Almost all the planting witnesses who appeared before the Committee held the view that the labourers were disinclined to use latrines.

accustomed to insanitary habits, were busy for long hours of the day in field work usually at a considerable distance from their dwellings. On the whole, while the prejudices and habits of the labourers were serious impediments against improvement of the general state of sanitation on the plantations, it cannot be overlooked that the management made no genuine effort at a comprehensive system of latrine construction, which as the medical officers in the plantation districts unanimously pointed out, was obviously a necessary preliminary step to wean the labourers from their habits. Even where blocks of land were allocated, there is evidence that sewage was not satisfactorily disposed.[27] The neighbourhood of the "coolie lines" was the area subjected to heaviest soil pollution. In spite of the fairly satisfactory progress of the low cost system of "trench latrines" with the labourers on estates where it was tried out, no widespread effort was made by the planters to provide even this primitive facility.[28] The cost of latrine construction no doubt dissuaded the planters.

The inevitable result of heavy and widespread soil pollution on a population living in a damp climate and engaged in field work with unprotected feet was to create a general state of ill-health. Soil pollution naturally contaminated the water supplies of the labourers which were drawn from unprotected streams and wells into which infected soil was carried by rain water. Besides, it was not uncommon for the labourers to use streams for the disposal of their excreta. A planter giving evidence before the Anchylostomiases Committee of 1910 pointed out that on his estate the water supplies for the use of the labourers were drawn from the same stream in which the labourers deposited their excreta.[29]

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27. DHMC, Proceedings, Cey. SP II of 1893, pp. 18-19.

28. Faeces voided in a trench in the ground and covered with earth to prevent the migration of anchylostomiases larvae and the breeding of flies. At best, this type of 'latrines' are suited for labour gangs in temporary occupation of an area.

29. FPRPAC, Cey. SP XXXI of 1910, p. 6.

The most distressing consequence of insanitation was the rapid and incessant spread of anchylostomiases while it also contributed to the spread of a host of other water-borne diseases, especially diarrhoea, dysentery, and enteric fever. Latrines, as the Medical Advisor to the Colonial Office, Sir Patrick Mason, pointed out, was the "crux of the anchylostomiases problem."[30] Anchylostomiases was the most widespread disease among the plantation labourers. Towards the end of our period it was discovered that practically every labourer on the estates suffered from it.[31] While anchylostomiases by its direct effect caused a certain percentage of deaths among the labourers it had the equally baneful consequence of gradually sapping the vitality of the infected, retarding the physical power of resistence, making his constitution easily susceptible to other bowel diseases such as diarrhoea and dysentery. Thus, as the Labour Commission of 1908 pointed out the ultimate result of widespread insanitation in the estates was to bring about "...a great deal of preventible disease and a certain amount of lose of life...."[32]

It is clear from the discussion in the present section that factors such as insanitation, ill-health, inadequate medical care, undernourishment, bad dwelling conditions, and exposure to wet and cold weather were the common denominators in the plantation labour life. This situation was made worse by the poverty, indebtedness, ignorance of the labour population, and the constant movement of gangs between estates. Thus, the overall picture was a distressing one. Nowhere was the ultimate adverse effect of the interaction of the aforesaid factors more succinctly illustrated than in the rate of infant mortality. The rate

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30. PRPAC, 'Discussion on sanitation in reference to anchylostomiases in the Tropics', Cey. SP XV of 1910, p. 7.

31. FPRAC, Cey. SP XXXI of 1910, p. ii.

32. Cey. Lab. Com. 1908, p. xviii.

of infant mortality is perhaps the most sensitive index of the health and conditions of life in any community; for the infants are the most susceptible section of the community to ill-health and bad living conditions and the first to succumb. Among the immigrant plantation labourers, the rate of infant mortality swelled throughout our period.[33]

As we will see later on, maternity welfare facilities in the plantations were minimal.[34] The expectant mothers in the estates were mostly attended at child birth by women from among the labour community. These "line Dhais", as they were known, had no proper mid-wife training and relied on customary knowledge. The earliest available account about the treatment given by the "line Dhais" is found in the Administrative Report of the Director of Sanitation for the year 1926. He pointed out that many infants died from debility caused often by the starvation of the infants during the first few weeks of life due to lack of milk in the mother as a result of the treatment received from the "line Dhais". He observed that on the birth of an infant, a decoction sufficient for ten days was prepared, and that for three days after the birth of the child the mother was given no nourishment beyond four cups of the decoction and an occasional cup of coffee or rice conjee. The decoction was continued up to the tenth day with increasing quantities of food. The infant was usually kept away from the breast for three days. The Director concluded that this treatment of the mother and the child had a debilitating effect resulting in a large number of infant and maternal deaths.[35] When breast milk failed it was not possible to obtain any suitable substitute. Consequently, "... unsuitable food is given, such as rice etc. which brings on diarrhoea, often ending in death."[36] Further

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33. See above, Table 6.3.

34. See below, pp. 324-325.

35. AR of the Director of Sanitation, CAR 1926, p.

36. AR of the PCMO for 1885, CAR 1885, p. 139D.

the general state of ill-health of the community, particularly the widespread prevalence of anchylostomiases among the females contributed its share to debilitate the conditions of the infants. One of the worst features of plantation life which adversely reacted on the health of the infants was the insanitary and unhygienic conditions of labour dwellings. Mothers returning to work after child birth at times took the infants to the work site due to the lack of proper attendance which precluded leaving infants behind in the "lines". This practice inevitably aggravated the ill-health of the infants.[37]

It is not correct to surmise that the general state of the health of the labourers as discussed above prevailed throughout the planting regions with the same degree of impact. There were obvious regional variations. Districts favourably situated as regards the climatic influences fared better. Particularly, the newly opened up low-country districts were more prone to spread of illness. Besides, the purity of the supplies of stream water depended largely on the location of the estates. Here again, the low-country districts with less flowing streams stood at a disadvantage. The old established estates had a certain percentage of resident labour who had got acclimatised and therefore were less susceptible to disease. The labour gangs on the estates of those humane planters who paid a greater attention to the question of public health were undoubtedly healthier than those on other estates. But these district- and estates-wise differences remained a matter of a degree. The basic problems were common throughout the planting districts.

There is another aspect which exerted an important influence on the level of living of the labourers, namely, their standard of literacy. There is no quantitative data on the level of literacy among the immigrant plantation labourers in our period. The earliest available data found in the Ceylon Census Reports of 1911 place the rate of literacy

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37. Lt. Gov. to S of S., No. 90 of 4 September 1885, C.O. 54/560. Report of the PCMO for 1884, enclosure in ibid.

among the estate labour population at 9 per cent.[38] The qualitative data available for our period leave us without any doubt that the vast majority of the labour population was illiterate and that literacy was by and large confined to the kanganies and sub-kanganies.[39] Widespread illiteracy and ignorance was a factor which contribute to perpetuate the servile bondage of the labourers to the kangany and the estate. The labourers even without the rudimentary understanding of reading and writing were left at a gross disadvantage in their dealings with the kangany and the shop-keeper and were often at their mercy. Extortion en route between South India and the plantations was largely the outcome of illiteracy. A proprietor-planter was quoted as saying that, "The head kangany is utterly devoid of the slightest sympathy towards his sub-kanganies and coolies, who are simply held in slavery. Ignorance, crass ignorance, is at the bottom of his chicanery..."[40]

The labourers themselves came from a community where illiteracy was widespread. Table 6.4 below, compiled from the data available in the Madras Census Report of 1901, reveals the state of literacy among the principal castes and the districts from which the immigrants plantation labour force was drawn. The district figures are for the entire population in the district. The rate of literacy of the lower castes were very much below the district rates. We will see later on that the facilities available in the estates for schooling were minimal and that there was little improvement in the level of literacy of the immigrant estate population throughout our period.

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38. Ceylon Census Report, 1911, Vol. on Population by Age etc., pp. 128 ff. In the previous census reports the statistics pertaining to estate Tamils were grouped together with Ceylon Tamils and therefore it is not possible to obtain seperate statistics for estate labourers.

39. Ibid., 1891, Vol. I, p. 31.
Ibid., Vol. I, p. 139.

40. A. G. H. Wise to Under S of S., 24 August 1904, PEITCC, Cey. SP IV of 1905, p. 18.

TABLE 6.4 Caste- and district-wise rate of literacy in South India, 1901 (literate per 1000 of population)

By caste		By district	
Kallan	53	Tanjore	101
Vellala	35	Tinnevelly	99
Palli	33	Madura	77
Ambalakaran	27	Trichinopoly	66
Pallen	12		
Puraiyan	5		
Chakkiliyan	1		

Source: Census of India, 1901, Vol. XV-A, Madras, pt. II, pp. 106-107.
Ibid., Vol. XV-B, Madras, pt. III, pp. 67-74.

Closely interrelated with the problem of schooling of estate labour children, there was the problem of child-labour on the estates. There was absolutely no age limit for child-labour on the tea estates. Nor were there regulated hours work for children on the estates. Child-labour helped the estates to meet the demand for extra hands in tea plucking during the peak season of work-load. For the labourers the employment of their children helped to augment the family earnings. Ignorance and poverty-stricken as they were, the bulk of the labourers preferred to send their children to the field than to the schools even where the schools were available. Indiscriminate child-labour without any legal precautions not only contributed to the evasion of schooling but it also worsened the general state of the childrens' health. Any individual efforts by the planters either to limit the hours of work or to impose an age-limit for child-labour would have exerted a disturbing influence on the labour force because such restrictions were bound to curtail the family income of the labourers. Imposition of restrictions by individual estates would have even resulted in the discontented labour gangs giving notice to move on to estates which did not impose such

restrictions. Only collective action would have brought about some satisfactory results. But the planting opinion was not sufficiently enlightented to forge ahead in this direction. More important, such restrictions would have affected the field work in the estates.

Conclusion

Ill-health and the low level of living inevitably retarded the efficiency of the labour force. Time and again, the planters complained of heavy incidence of absenteeism and the general state of inefficiency of the labourers. The Labour Commission of 1908 succinctly pointed out about the prevalence of a "...large wasteage of energy indicated by the poor average out-turn." It found that "...at least one quarter of the entire labour force available in the Colony fails daily to turn out to work."[41] This was with the weekly rice issue made dependent on the number of days a labourer turned out for work. Throughout our period it was strongly felt that the seasonal shortage of labour which occurred in some years could be overcome if the labourers turned out for work more regularly. The planters attributed the poor turn-out mainly to laziness and they characterised the labourers as a community who worked basically to obtain their measure of rice. But the factors which brought about a high incidence of absenteeism were more latent. Coming from a peasant sector the labourers lacked the discipline necessary for regular work required of a modern labour force. This is seen in the available evidence on malingering among the labourers.[42] We have also seen in chapter V that constant movement of labour gangs between estates and also the perpetual indebtedness of the labourers contributed to increase the incidence of absenteeism in some ways.[43] Besides these factors, the poor

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41. Cey. Lab. Com. 1908, Report, p. xi.

42. Ibid., Proceedings.

health and living conditions no doubt seriously hampered any striking progress in the efficiency of the labour force. This at any rate is the only conclusion one could reach on the basis of the evidence set out in the Table below which shows a direct link between the high rate of absenteeism and the relatively unhealthy low-country planting districts which also were the districts which offered relatively poorer conditions of living.

TABLE 6.5 Some available evidence on the turn-out of the immigrant plantation labourers

Planting district	Average daily turn-out (percentage of the labour force)
Kalutara	65-75
Kelani Valley	65-75
Kegalle	60-70
Badulla	80-87
Dikoya	85-90
Pundaluoya	83

Source: Cey. Lab. Com. 1908, Proceedings.

CHAPTER VII

LABOUR WELFARE SCHEMES

In the present chapter we will look into the steps taken by the planters and the Colonial Government to improve the conditions of health of the estate labourers in our period, which witnessed two medical welfare schemes--the first inaugurated in the years 1880-2 and a supplementary scheme brought in, in 1893. Medical welfare was a major field relating to immigrant labour which provoked animated discussion and bitter controversies between the Colonial Government and the planters--controversies which reveal the contemporary thinking and the role of the planters and the Government towards improving the health of the labourers. The schemes mark a major departure from the somewhat laissez faire attitude of the Colonial Government during the previous fifty years towards the question of medical welfare of estate labourers. Government involvements in the plantation labour medical welfare measures in Ceylon show some similarity in this sphere with the set-up in those countries which imported Indian labour under the indenture system. The similarity is a rare one; for, on the whole, the labour system in Ceylon was left free of Government interference, unlike the indenture system which was subjected to Government control and supervision. Even in the sphere of medical welfare, Government interference into planter-labour relations in Ceylon fell far short of the degree of interference which prevailed in other countries. The medical schemes also reveal a greater financial but a lesser personal commitment by the planter in the medical care of the labourers in our period. Besides, the working of the schemes show the improvements which took place in the conditions of labour life on the plantations and helps us to grasp the fundamental causes of the general state of ill-health that pervaded their life throughout the period despite the medical welfare measures. At the outset we will discuss the background and the origins of the 1880-2 scheme,

outline its major provisions, and discuss its fortunes during the first decade of its implementation. The scheme will be dealt with comprehensively because it remained as the basis of labour medical welfare for several decades. We will thereafter look into the origins of the 1893 scheme and the working of the combined schemes during the next two decades. Finally, we will examine the progress made in our period in the other fields of labour welfare, particularly public health, maternal and child care, and the education of estate children..

1. Pre-1880 set-up

The 1880-? scheme which remained as the basis of the medical welfare measures in our period can be viewed as a major new development as well as a firm break from the general tenor of the pre-1880 medical welfare measures. The main feature of Government policy up to 1880 was to leave as much of the medical welfare of the labourers as possible in the hands of the employers.[1] During the 1830s and 1840s, the Government paid little or no special attention to the problem. The planters kept a stock of medicine and themselves attended to the simple ailments of the labourers. The more serious cases were despatched to the Government hospitals.[2] But

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1. The history of the plantation labour medical measures in the coffee period has been dealt in the following research studies. I. H. Vanden Driesen, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, London, 1954; B. Bastiampillai, 1968; M. W. Roberts, 1966b. S. A. Meegama (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, London, 1968) has dealt briefly with the medical schemes in our period. He has, however, concentrated his attention more on the second quarter of the twentieth century. L. R. Jayawardena (unpublished dissertation for research fellowship, Cambridge, 1960) who has devoted his work to our period has restricted his study to the behaviour of the entrepreneur towards the working of the schemes. For the period prior to 1880, we have indicated only the broad themes based on the above works in order to place our study in its historical perspective.

2. Memorial of PAC to S of S, PPAC 1882, Correspondence, p. 186.

Government hospitals were few in number and were situated in the main towns, usually a long way from the plantations. Besides, the planters were charged for maintaining sick labourers in the hospitals, which was obviously a factor dissuading the planters from sending their labourers for treatment. By the 1850^{s} some plantations had begun to form groups to engage the services of a medical man--either a doctor or a dispenser. The Government then viewed the medical welfare of the labourers as the sole responsibility of the planters and gave statutory recognition to this attitude in the Master-Servant Law of 1865. It enacted that

> Any servant who shall be incapacitated by sickness from labour whilst in the service of any employer shall be entitled to lodging, food, as well as medical care, at the expense of such employer during such incapacity; provided that the employer shall not be bound to pay to the servant during such a period his wages in addition.3

In the subsequent decades the above clause became a point of controversy between the Government and the planters, each trying to "pass the buck"--the responsibility for the medical welfare of the labourers on the other.

The first practical intervention by the Government came about in 1872 with the Ordinance No. 14 of that year. The glaring inadequacy of the existing medical arrangements, the high hospital mortality rate among the immigrant labourers, the belief of imperfect fulfillment of the obligation by the employers, and the Colonial Office criticisms of the medical arrangements convinced Governor William Gregory of the need for a closely State-controlled and a State-supervised medical scheme for the plantation labourers. But the planters objected to the idea of State intervention into planter-labour relations. Besides, a comprehensive medical scheme was bound to involve additional cost to the planters. Gregory viewed the goodwill of the planters as a necessary condition for the success of the estate medical scheme. The result was an attempt at a compromise which eventually turned out to be a very uneasy one. The new scheme was virtually a planter-run medical scheme with very limited and remote control

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3. Clause 27, Ordinance No. II of 1865, Ceylon. Legislative Enactments, Vol. I, (Revised, 1923), p. 570.

and supervision by the Government. The planting area was divided into districts; each district was to have a hospital with an European medical officer. The working of the scheme in each district was in charge of a District Medical Committee of planters. The scheme was to be financed by an acreage tax on the estates--the feature of the scheme most resented by the planters. The Government reserved the power to take over the functions of inefficient District Committees and also appointed an Inspector to advise and supervise the work of the committees, to supervise the medical arrangement in the hospitals, to visit estates, and to furnish annual reports to the Government on the working of the scheme.

The scheme, however, failed to bring about an appreciable improvement in the conditions of the labourers' health. The planters, the Government officials, Gregory, and eventually the Commission appointed in 1879 to review the working of the scheme, were unanimous that the scheme was unsatisfactory. The scheme depended for its success on the active co-operation of the planters. Their lack of enthusiasm and general indifference was an important factor in the ultimate failure of the scheme. As we will see later on, the scheme itself was defective and inadequate. Besides, there were frequent disagreements between the planters, medical men, and the Government officials in the implementation of the scheme. The unprecedented influx of the immigrants into the planting areas consequent on the South Indian famine of 1876-8 finally sealed the fate of the scheme.

2. The 1880-2 estate medical welfare scheme

During the late 1870s and the early 1880s the problem of the medical welfare of the immigrant plantation workers came to the limelight again and the planters and the Colonial Government began to search for a better alternative. On the one hand, there was the growing dissatisfaction against the working of the 1872 arrangement. It was inadequate and unsatisfactory to cope with the health problems of the plantation workers even during normal years of labour immigration. On the other hand, the heavy influx of the famine-stricken immigrants from South India in 1877-8 strained the existing scheme to the point of collapse. The hospital death rate among the immigrant labour population increased swiftly and the Colonial Office and the Colonial Government became increasingly alive to the problem. Governor Gregory himself realised the need for a new approach but bequeathed the task to his successor, J. R. Longden. The period from the latter's assumption of the governorship in 1879 up to the time of the settlement of the new scheme in 1882 witnessed the bitterest of the clashes between the planters and the Colonial Government in the entire history of the estate medical welfare schemes. Not the least of the causes for the intensity of the clash lay in the deepening economic crisis in the plantation agriculture in the Island in these years. The controversies centred mainly around the method of financing the new scheme and, to a lesser extent, on the nature of the scheme.

As regards the nature of the scheme, the planters on the whole favoured a return to the pre-1872 "paternal arrangement" where there was little interference from the Government.[4] But the Colonial Government and the Colonial Office would have none of it.[5] The policy of leaving the

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4. The Deputation of the PAC to the Gov., 9 February 1882, PPAC 1882, p. 158.
5. Gov. to S of S., No. 78 of 20 February 1882, Minute by C. P. Lucas, C.O. 54/547.

medical care of the labourers solely in the hands of the employers had not brought about any striking improvement in the health of the labourers. The need for a comprehensive scheme of medical aid either managed by the Government or run by the planters under close Government supervision was apparent, particularly in view of the immensity of the problem of high hospital death rate of the immigrants. The planters' opinion, which in the early 1870s was opposed almost to a man to Government interference, gradually drifted towards the end of the decade in favour of a Government-run medical scheme.[6] The working of the 1872 scheme had been a nuisance to many planters involving a sacrifice of time, particularly in attending Medical Committee meetings. Besides, the ultimate objective of the planters was to get the Government to take over both the management and the financing of the medical welfare of the labourers. Governor Longden, personally, had no sympathy with a Government medical scheme because of the greater cost such a scheme would entail.[7] Nevertheless, he expressed his willingness to undertake such a scheme if the planters were prepared to entrust the management of the scheme to the Government. The result was the final acceptance of the idea of a Government medical scheme in place of the planter-run scheme of the pre-1880 era. The responsibility of the Government for the management of the new scheme was distinctly embodied in the Medical Wants Ordinance No. 17 of 1880.[8]

Violent friction, however, occurred between the Government and the planters on the question of raising money to run the new scheme. The planters vehemently objected to bear the cost of the medical scheme and argued that it should be defrayed out of the general revenue of the

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6. CLC, Governors' Addresses, Vol. II, 7 May 1877, p. 485.
7. Ibid.
   The Deputation of PAC to the Gov., 9 February 1882, PPAC 1882, p. 156.
8. Clause 3 of the Ordinance, PPAC 1882, Correspondence, p. 192.

Government.[9] They contended that the obligations imposed on them by the Master-Servant Ordinance of 1865 was limited and pointed out their willingness to pay the cost of hospital treatment of sick labourers for a reasonable time, to keep medicine on the estates, to personally attend to the ordinary ailments, and to provide mothers with sufficient food and lodging free of charge during the first month of their post-natal period.[10] Beyond these, the planters were not prepared to bear the cost of a comprehensive medical scheme involving the construction and maintenance of hospitals and the payment of salaries to medical officers. This standpoint of the planters was substantially a repetition of what they advocated in 1872 but repeated with greater vehemence due to the deepening financial crisis which the planters were facing in the years 1879-82.

The main arguments of the planters were three-fold. First, that the planting industry was responsible for the increase in Government revenue in the nineteenth century and that the planting interests therefore has a strong claim on the general revenue of the Government. Secondly, that the labourers and the planters paid their due share to the general taxation of the Government and were therefore entitled to share the benefits of Government medical facilities which were made available free of special charges to the other sections of the population. Thirdly, the coffee industry on which the prosperity of the colony depended was passing through an unprecedented depression and therefore required relief.[11] The planters tried every conceivable method to bring pressure on the Government by way of special meetings, submission of petitions, going in deputation to the Governor, and eventually by memorialising the Colonial Office and the

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9. Twenty-sixth AnR of PAC, PPAC 1880, p. xxiv.
   Twenty-seventh AnR of PAC, ibid 1881, p. xx.

10. Gov. to S of S., No. 51 of 2 February 1882, enclosure, Protest by J. L. Shand and W. W. Mitchell, C.O. 54/537.

11. A general meeting of PAC, 8 October 1880, PPAC 1881, pp. 43-44.
    A general meeting of PAC, 28 December 1880, ibid., pp. 59-65.
    CH 1881, 24 November 1880, p.

Queen.[12] If the general revenue of the Government was unable to bear the cost, and if special taxation was found necessary, the planters argued that the labourers should be made to foot the medical aid bill. To wit they advocated an increase in the existing import duty on rice.

However, the Colonial Office and the Colonial Government considered that it was obligatory for the planters to bear the total cost of the estate medical scheme.[13] It was pointed out to the planters that they paid little or nothing to import labourers unlike their counterpart in other British colonies who had to incur heavy costs to import indentured labourers. The Government held that it was unfair to saddle the general public with the cost of the medical care of the immigrant labourers, particularly because the bulk of the native population were not directly connected with the plantation industry. It was also shown that the magnitude of the public health problems of the immigrant labourers called for special arrangements for their medical care, that the cost of such special arrangement was part and parcel of the cost of production of plantation produce and should therefore be borne by the planters.[14] The planters' suggestion to increase the customs duty on imported rice was met with vigorous criticisms from the Governor as inexpedient "not merely unprecedented and objectionable... also radically unjust", besides the revenue from such a measure being insufficient to meet the estate medical bill.[15] The planters were told that the growth of Government revenue did not entitle them to expect the care of the labourers to be made a charge on the public revenue because the rise in revenue had been

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12. The petition of PAC to the Queen, PPAC 1882, Correspondence, pp. 164-167. Sec. of PAC to Col. Sec., 25 February 1881, enclosure, memorial of PAC to the S of S., ibid., pp. 185-187.

13. Gov. to S of S., No. 287 of 30 December 1880, C.O. 54/529. CLC, Governors' Addresses, Vol. III, 15 December 1880, p. 94.

14. Lt. Gov. to S of S., No. 12 of 5 March 1881, C.O. 54/532. S of S. to Gov., No. 264 of 12 August 1881, C.O. 54/533.

15. Gov. to S of S., No. 287 of 30 December 1880, C.O. 54/529.

accompanied by augmented expenditure, a large proportion of which had been directly or indirectly devoted to the coffee districts.

Having taken the above stand firmly, the Colonial Government searched for a mode of collecting the money in a manner least onerous and irksome to the planters.[16] Longden was prepared to modify points of detail in an attempt to win the goodwill of the planters as far as possible without sacrificing the basic principle of the planters' liability to bear the cost. Thus, in addressing the Legislative Council he declared

> ... it is comparatively immaterial by what machinery the fund is raised, so long as the principle is maintained that the cost of the medical care of the immigrant coolies shall be borne by those for whose benefit those immigrants have been and are annually introduced and are employed.17

Three modes of collection were proposed. There was the acreage tax adopted in 1872. But this had been tried and disliked both by the planters and the Government.[18] It was found difficult and expensive to collect. Besides, it was objected to as being unfair, for under the acreage tax all estates were taxed at the same rate irrespective of their varying yield. The alternatives were either an export duty on plantation produce which was strongly recommended by the Colonial Government or a capitation tax according to the number of labourers employed on the estates—a recommendation insisted by the Colonial Office. The years 1879-81 witnessed a continuous debate on the merits and demerits of these two modes of collection—the Colonial Government and the Colonial Office taking their stand firmly on their respective suggestions and the planters attacking both in an attempt to evade payment towards the medical aid scheme. Of the two modes, however, the general tone of the planters attack reveals

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16. Gov. to S of S., No. 70 of 4 March 1880, C.O. 54/525.

17. CLC, Governors' Addresses, Vol. III, 15 December 1880, p. 94.

18. Gov. to S of S., No. 506 of 20 December 1879, C.O. 54/
Gov. to S of S., No. 14 of 13 January 1881, C.O. 54/531.

that their hostility to the capitation tax was stronger than against the export duty.[19]

The Colonial Government saw several advantages in the export duty over the capitation tax. It had nearly the same advantage as the capitation tax for it was roughly equitable in incidence. Moreover, it was less expensive in collection because the customs duty did not require an extra elaborate machinery for its collection. It was less dilatory and less troublesome to estate superintendents and also less irritating to them because the collection was not constantly before their eyes, being an indirect tax. In these respects, the duty had distinct advantages over both the acreage and capitation taxes. Consequently, the Colonial Government embodied the idea of the export duty in Ordinance No. 17 of 1880 despite Colonial Office recommendations to the contrary and planters' hostility.[20]

However, when the bill reached London for ratification the Colonial Office steadfastly pressed for the capitation tax in place of the duty.[21] In an age when Britain was rapidly going over to the concept of free trade, to the Colonial Office the words "export duties" sounded as an anathema. In actual fact, the export duty in the Ordinance of 1880 had little to do with the laissez faire objections to export-import duties. The plantation products in Ceylon were mainly for export and only a very small quantity was consumed in the Island. Among the officials in the Colonial Office only Under-Secretary, C. P. Lucas, saw the distinct practical advantage of the duty over the capitation tax in the context of the issue in Ceylon.[22] He presented the majority view in the Colonial Office in

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19. A special general meeting of PAC, 6 January 1882, PPAC 1882, pp. 114-115.

20. S of S. to Gov., No. 56 of 18 December 1880, C.O. 54/

21. S of S. to Gov., No. 89 of 18 March 1881, C.O. 54/529.
S of S. to Gov., No. 234 of 12 August 1881, C.O. 54/533.

22. Gov. to S of S., No. 287 of 30 December 1880, Minute by C. P. Lucas, C.O. 54/529.
Gov. to S of S., No. 78 of 20 February 1882, Minute by C. P. Lucas, C.O. 54/537.

a nutshell thus

> The objection to it are, that it might be very hard on some estates, that the most productive may pay too much, the least productive too little--that further it might be difficult in collecting the tax between the planters of coffee and that grown by the native Sinhalese; and lastly that the House of Commons would object (wrongly) to the name export duty, while the planters would always be able to get up an agitation against it on account of its sound.23

The Colonial Office pressure led reluctant Longden and the Colonial Government, amidst violent opposition from the planters, to pass the amending Ordinance No. 11 of 1881 substituting the capitation tax in place of the duty in the Ordinance of 1880. This then was the arrangement in 1881.

But the financial arrangement in the 1880-1 scheme failed to get off the ground. The crucial factor was the precipitous financial crisis in the plantation sector due to continuous ravages of the coffee leaf disease on top of declining coffee prices. The deepening economic plight had two effects. First, the intensity of the depression in the years 1881-2 caused a change of heart on the part of Longden and the Colonial Government towards the planters. They saw the need to relieve them from the severity of the repeated crises which afflicted the plantation agriculture in the Island.[24] Longden recommended that the general revenue of the Government should bear a part of the cost of the medical care of the labourers. However, Longden was not ready to shift grounds from the basic principle of the fundamental liability of the planters and still maintained that it was only the special circumstances which caused him to relieve the planters. The Colonial Office, however, was not ready to grant even this partial concession "... at the expense of the general community of the medical care of the labourers whom they employ."[25] But the deeping economic

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23. Ibid.

24. Gov. to S of S., No. 78 of 20 February 1882, C.O. 54/537.
The Deputation of PAC to the Governor, PPAC 1882, p. 163.

25. Ibid.
S of S, to Gov., No. 137 of 20 April 1882, C.O. 54/537.

depression and the pressure from the planters and the Colonial Government pushed the Colonial Office to finally consent.[26] In agreeing to let the general revenue bear half the cost of medical welfare for the year 1882 the Secretary of State, Earl of Kimberley, wrote that the concession should be regarded as a purely temporary measure of relief in view of the depression and not necessarily to be renewed in future years.[27]

Thus, the basic principle of the planters' liability remained. With it, the issue had yet to be resolved for the capitation tax to which the Colonial Government and the planters vehemently objected still remained on the statute book. The depression had the effect of escalating a severe attack by the planters and the Colonial Government on the capitation tax. The central point of criticism was the impracticability of making anything like a correct assessment of the number of labourers on each estate.[28] This was the weakest point of the capitation tax compared with both the acreage tax and the export duty, for out of the three aspects of plantation land (for the acreage tax), labour (for the capitation tax), and produce (for the export duty), labour was the field on which it was most difficult to obtain correct statistical returns. In this respect the situation in Ceylon was different from that of the other British colonies which imported indentured labour under Government supervision and which therefore had fairly reliable statistics on the strength of the labour force on each plantation. The highly migrant character of the labour force between South India and Ceylon and also between estates made it difficult to obtain correct figures on the number of labourers in each plantation. Besides, the planters viewed the compiling and forwarding of returns as an unnecessary

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26. Gov. to S of S., telegram, No. 575 of 16 May 1882, C.O. 54/539.

27. S of S. to Gov., No. 174 of 22 May 1882, ibid.
The Government decided to relieve the planters at a time when its treasury was seriously depleted, its policy of collecting peasant taxes was rigorously implemented, and its expenditure severely retrenched.

28. Lt. Gov. to S of S., No. 174 of 8 July 1881, C.O. 54/533.
Gov. to S of S., No. 244 of 3 June 1882, enclosure, reports of several Government officials and planters, C.O. 54/539.

and time-consuming duty and a step in the direction of Government interference in to planter-labour industrial relation--something which they despised. The Government had reservations on the question whether the planters would submit correct statistics on the size of the labour force on the estates in a situation where such statistics were collected mainly to be used to impose additional taxes on the planters themselves. The only way to check the forwarding of false statistics was to impose a heavy penalty on the employers found guilty. But such a step was bound to cause friction between the planters and the Government officials. All this could be avoided and the collection be done economically and simply by an export duty. The strong opposition of the planters and the Colonial Government drove the Colonial Office to reverse its stand, drop its insistence on the capitation tax, and allow the re-enactment of the export duty. Earl of Kimberly minuted to his juniors that,

> When ... there is a determined opposition on the part of both the Government and the planters to a scheme of taxation, it is hopeless to make it work. Those who work it, will not give it a fair chance. I should therefore resign the contest. The question is how we can most gracefully surrender, and when.29

As with the question of temporary concessions to the planters facing an unprecedented financial crisis, so with the capitation tax, the earlier, somewhat unrealistic attitude of the remote Colonial Office gave way in the end to the more realistic stand taken by the local authorities on the spot.

The Ordinance No. 9 of 1882 re-imposed the export duty but with a difference. Under the amended law the duty was reduced by 50 per cent of what was originally imposed in 1880. Besides, the Government also decided to throw open, for the benefit of the estate labourers, the Government civil hospitals situated in or near the planting districts, in addition to the district hospitals meant for the labourers under the new estate medical scheme. These civil hospitals were hitherto restricted to

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29. Gov. to S of S., No. 244 of 3 June 1882, Minute by S of S., ibid.

the indigenous population in the Island. Despite the concessions the planters continued their protest against the basic principle of the Ordinance and reiterated their view that the entire cost of the hospital scheme should be defrayed from the general revenue of the Government.[30]

The new Medical Aid Fund which derived its source of finance from the export duty and the charges on the estates for the medical visits and hospital treatment of the labourers came into operation in 1883. In the next decade, several developments relative to the financial basis of the Fund took place. For the year 1883, the Government had to bridge a heavy deficit in the working of the medical scheme. The Governor and the Colonial Office were not willing to let this "monstrous state of things" to continue.[31] Thus, in 1884 the Government charged the whole of the salaries of the medical men to the Fund and also raised the export levy to the maximum fixed by the law.[32] Nevertheless, the deficit in the estate medical budget persisted and the Government's share to meet the deficit became an annual feature. The amount the Government had to meet out of the general revenue also increased annually with the increase in the total medical aid bill. Thus, though the original theory was that the 1880-2 scheme should pay its own way, the cost of the medical care of the labourers, in fact, came to be shared by the Government with the planters.

Whereas the planters paid a portion of the medical aid bill, they succeeded in recouping at least a part of that cost from the labourers with the profit they made on rice issued to the labourers as part-payment of the labourers' wages.[33] In fact, when the medical scheme was debated in the years 1880-2, the possibility of such an outcome was put forward as an argument to get themselves exempted from the financial liability

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30. Twenty-ninth AnR of PAC, PPAC 1883, p. xx.
31. Gov. to S of S., No. 259 of 9 July 1884, Minute by Wingfield, C.O. 54/554.
32. Gov. to S of S., No.47 of 6 February 1886, C.O. 54/563.
33. DHMC,Proceedings, Cey. SP II of 1893, p. 20.

of the medical care of the labourers.[34]

We turn now to an examination of the medical arrangement itself and its working. The Ordinance No. 17 of 1880 detailed the scheme as follows. The planting area was divided into medical districts, each under the charge of a Government medical officer with one or two Ceylonese medical assistants. Each district was to have a District Hospital with one or more outdoor dispensaries attached to each hospital. The medical officer was expected to visit the hospital daily. The planters were obliged to send their sick labourers to the hospitals,and the estates were liable to pay at the rate of 30 cents per day up to a maximum of thirty days towards the maintenance of each sick labourer in the hospital. When required by the estate superintendent the District Medical Officer was obliged to visit the estate and for each such visit the estate had to pay Rs.2.50. In default of the payment of these fees, the movable property of the estate was liable to be seized and auctioned to recover the arreas. Superintending Medical Officers were to be appointed, whose duties were to visit the "coolie lines" on the estates at least every six months and draw the attention of the estate superintendents to any defect in the sanitary conditions of the "lines". Besides those indicated above, the scheme placed several other duties on the planters. They had to maintain the "coolie lines" in a fair sanitary condition; to inform themselves of all cases of sickness among the labourers and to take steps for their immediate relief; to inform the district medical officer of all births and deaths on the estates within 48 hours of their occurrence; to maintain a register of immigrant labour employed, their arrivals and depatures; and also to supply every mother with food and lodging for a fortnight after the birth of her child and not to permit her to work for a month unless the District Medical Officer certified to the contrary. The kanganies were required to report all cases of sickness in their gangs to their

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34. Deputation of PAC to the Gov., 9 February 1882, PPAC 1882, p. 146.

employers. Failure to discharge the above responsibilities made the planter and the kangany liable to prosecution and conviction, the former for an amount not exceeding Rs.50 and the latter up to Rs.20.

The scheme was undoubtedly an improvement on the 1872 scheme. The number of hospitals available increased from seven under the pre-1880 system to fifteen in 1883.[35] The Medical Aid Bill increased annually. The Principal Civil Medical Officer took great care and interest to organise the new scheme.[36] A system of sanitary inspection of estates was inaugurated. There were several vigilant medical officers who took an interest in the working of the scheme. The employment of Ceylonese medical practitioners helped to cut down costs.[37] Besides, they obviously understood the language, the customs and the prejudices of the labourers better than the European medical men. The inauguration of the new scheme was accompanied by a regular system of vaccination of labourers on the estates in order to eradicate smallpox. Unlike the former scheme in the 1870s, the new scheme was not overstrained in the first few years of its existence because the flow of labour immigration declined during the early 1880s. Above all, the management of the medical welfare of the labourers was removed from the unskilled hands of the planters and was now placed in the skilled hands of the Government medical department--a major development from the earlier set-up.

It is, however, difficult to gauge the actual impact of the scheme on the health of the labourers, and the only reliable index available on the issue, namely, the district hospital mortality rates of the labourers,

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35. The seven District Hospitals organised under the 1872 scheme were taken over and the eight Civil Hospitals in the planting districts hitherto used exclusively by the indigenous population were also thrown open for the treatment of the immigrants.

36. Gov. to S of S., No. 320 of 30 June 1883, enclosure I, PCMO to Col. Sec., 20 June 1883, C.O. 54/547.

37. Under the 1872 scheme there were 22 European medical officers and Ceylonese were not employed as medical men in the scheme. Under the 1880-2 scheme, the number of European medical men were reduced to 15. They were placed on a salary scale of Rs.4000/= per annum and the Ceylonese medical assistants on a scale of Rs.1000-Rs.1500.

which we have already seen in chapter VI, reveal that the rates continued to be as high as before and at any rate higher than the mortality rate of the "mixed races" who were treated in the same hospitals. Throughout the 1880s, the Colonial Office drew the attention of the Colonial Government to this feature in an effort to find the cause and a remedy for it.[38]

It is abundantly clear from all available evidence that the basic cause of the heavy hospital death rate among the immigrants was the late admission of the sick to the hospitals, in an advanced stage of the illness from which it was found difficult to recover. The first inquiry into this problem under the new medical scheme was held in 1885. Every one of the twenty one medical men working in the planting districts gave evidence at this inquiry and all of them attributed the heavy death rate to the moriband condition of the sick at the time of admission to the hospitals.[39] The following excerpt from the evidence of one them is typical.

> ... many of the fatal cases were brought in when the disease was in its last stage, and the vital powers of the patient were at their lowest ebb from want of proper attention and nourishment. It is worthy of note that no less than 16 patients died within the third day of admission ... a very large number of the fatal cases were not sent to Hospital till the disease had become chronic and incurable.40

Throughout the 1880s the officials and the planting community concurred with the above view, and finally it was confirmed by the District Hospitals Mortality Commission of 1893 which reviewed the working of the 1880-2 medical scheme.[41]

The planters and the medical men were, however, at variance about their respective roles in bringing about this situation. There were at times sharp conflict of views between them, the planters blaming the medical arrangement as a factor dissuading the labourers from going to

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38. S of S. to Gov., No. 138 of 19 June 1886, C.O. 54/564.
S of S. to Gov., No. 167 of 23 May 1892, C.O. 54/600.

39. Gov. to S of S., No. 264 of 19 June 1885, enclosure III, PCMO to Col. Sec., 9 June 1885, annexure, reports of medical officer, C.O. 54/559

40. Report of O. Bartholomeusz of Haputale hospital, p. 8 , ibid.

41. DHMC, Report and Proceedings, Cey. SP II of 1893.

the hospitals and the medical men accusing the planters of not carrying out their duty in sending the sick to the hospitals at an early stage of the disease.

There is no doubt that the average immigrant plantation worker was reluctant to go to hospital. This attitude was partly due to his ignorance, prejudices, and lack of appreciation of western medical treatment. Besides, there was the strong desire to live with his family and relations in the hour of distress.[42] It was alleged that the caste distinctions among the different low caste labourers played an important role in deterring them from going to hospitals.[43] The labourers on the whole disliked the food cooked by men of those castes which they considered to be inferior to their own. However, the hospital authorities allowed the relations of hospital inmates to prepare the latters' food by giving them food-stuffs and also by permitting them to use the hospital compound for cooking purposes.

The available evidence strongly suggests that the reluctance of the labourers to go to hospital became a decisive factor mainly under certain circumstances--circumstances in which the medical scheme, the kanganies, the planters, and the plantation labour system played important roles. It cannot be ignored that the labourer's attitude was partly influenced by the past record of the hospitals as a place with a heavy death rate--a dreadful place where, in the eyes of the sick labourers, they were destined to die.[44] It is pertinent, however, to note that where the estates were situated in close proximity to the hospitals both the planters and the medical men found a favourable response from the labourers towards hospital treatment.[45] Thus, J. C. Dunbar whose plantation was only two

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42. Ibid., p. 14.
43. Ibid., pp. 2, 7, 11.
44. Ibid., pp. 6, 21.
45. Ibid., pp. 2-4, 9-10.

and a half miles away from the hospital stated that his labourers appreciated hospital treatment and he concluded that "when the hospital is within reasonable distance they are willing to go."[46] On the other hand, W. H. Walker whose estates was sixteen miles away from the nearest hospital found "... very great objection because they say that the hospital is so far away that their friends cannot go and see them."[47] The distance between the estate and the hospital was therefore a crucial factor. Most of the estates were situated at a long distance from the hospitals and in some cases about thirty miles away.[48] The seperation of the sick from friends and relations was not a deterrent where the hospitals were sited near the estates. Besides, the mode of transporting the sick to the hospital in a cumbly strung in a pole--a primitive method most irksome to the sick--did not turn out to be so bad when the hospitals were not too far.[49] The fact is that even in 1893 there were only thirteen district hospitals to serve nearly 1300 estates spread mostly over the hilly central Ceylon. Throughout the 1880s there were frequent complaints that the available accommodation in the hospitals was inadequate and the medical staff insufficient.[50] The district hospitals taken over from the planters in 1883 were said to be in a dilapidated state. During the 1880s very little extentions to the existing hospitals were carried out and no new hospitals were constructed due to the depleted state of the colonial treasury. As a result hospitals were subjected to overcrowding and at times only the bad cases were admitted.

Within this general framework of inadequate medical facilities there were other factors which deterred the labourers from seeking early

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46. Ibid., p. 22.

47. Ibid., p. 20.

48. Ibid., pp. 4-5.

49. Gov. to S of S., No. 287 of August 1894, enclosure I, PCMO to Col. Sec., 16 January 1894, C.O. 54/616.

50. Gov. to S of S., No. 196 of 24 May 1884, enclosure, Hospital Returns for 1883, C.O. 54/553.

hospital treatment. The plantation wage system had a discouraging effect. As seen earlier on, the worker was reckoned as a day labourer and was paid according to the number of days he actually worked. Absence from work meant no wages and no rice. Besides, the kanganies' "head money" depended on the strength of the daily turn out of his labour gang for work, and if a labourer was on the sick list the kangany lost his commission. Moreover, the kanganies were always afraid that their labourers would run away. Thus, the kanganies' influence had the effect of discouraging the labourers having recourse to the hospitals.[51] The pressure on the labourers to turn up for work was heavy particularly in the peak seasons of work-load in the estates. The above stated factors exerted some degree of compulsion on the labourers to work even under condition of physical debility and in times of convalescence. Evidence suggests that the average labourer normally continued to work till he was too weak to carry on. This naturally made his illness serious by the time he sought relief and medical care.

Due to the operation of the above factors some pressure had invariably to be applied on the labourers for them to seek early hospital treatment. It is precisely for this reason that Ordinance No. 17 of 1880 imposed certain obligations on the planter and the kangany in this respect. But the available evidence suggests that these obligations were not satisfactorily carried out.[52] The labour force was organised in gangs under the immediate control of the kanganies; and the relationship between the labourers and the estate superintendent was a relatively remote one.

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51. DHMC, Proceedings, Cey. SP II of 1893, pp. 5, 9.
District Court, Badulla, case No. 22196, WCO, 14 June 1880.
Gov. to S of S., No. 264 of 19 June 1885, enclosure III, PCMO to Col. Sec., 9 June 1885, C.O. 54/559.

52. Report of the Medical Assistant, Dimbulla Hospital, ibid.
Gov. to S of S., No. 480 of 30 November 1890, enclosure III, Memo by Col. Sec., C.O. 54/590.

There were three ways in which an employer could find out if a labourer was sick. There was the labourers' absence at daily muster. But this was not effective in a labour force where absenteeism due to various causes occurred between twenty and thirty per cent of the total labour force on the estate Check-roll.[53] Besides, in the planter-labour jargon "sick" was the usual word used to report any kind of absence. As a planter pointed out, "...'sick' is just another word for 'absent'", and he continued that when a labourer is reported sick he would take it to mean either that the labourer had gone away to see a friend or was simply loafing about the "coolie lines."[54] Usually the estate superintendent relied solely on the kangany for information about the illness of a labourer in the kangany's gang.[55] On the kangany's response to this legal obligation, the available evidence from the planters is conflicting.[56] It is pertinent to recall that it was in the kangany's immediate interest to prevent a labourer going to hospital at an early stage of his sickness. The third method was the failure on the part of the labourers to collect their weekly rice issue. When a labourer absented himself continuously for a number of days and did not turn up for the rice issue the average superintendent began inquiries. The following account of a planter is typical of the overall set-up.

> Every Saturday night when rice is issued if a cooly has not been working for a week we immediately institute inquiries. If it is a case where the kangany deliberately does not wish the cooly to go to hospital, of course he will say that the cooly has either gone working in contract or has gone on a visit to his friends. That is frequently done, and in that way we would not know. Our only means of ascertaining is through the kangany, and we depend upon the information we get from the kangany. I could not go to the lines and find out about every individual cooly.57

There were humane planters who followed up when their labourers were absent

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53. See above, p. 279.

54. DHMC, Proceedings, Coy. SP II of 1893, p. 10.

55. Ibid., Proceedings.

56. Ibid., pp. 5, 7.

57. Ibid., p. 14.

for two or three days and who even did visit the "coolie lines."[58] But evidence suggests that this type of planter was an exception. Apart from all other deterring factors, the average planter of the 1880's hardly found the time to pursue every individual case of illness in the labour force.[59] He had therefore necessarily to depend on the kangany.

The above discussion shows that a labourer could be sick for several days without the superintendent knowing; and in fact the consensus of the planter opinion at the time was that a cooly might be absent a week before it was discovered that he was sick.[60] It is pertinent to recall that the average labourer absented himself from work due to sickness only when he could no longer work and when the sickness had advanced to a certain stage. Even after a superintendent discovered the sick labourer, there were several factors which had a restraining influence on him from taking immediate steps to despatch the labourer to the hospital. Apart from the reluctance of the labourers, mainly due to the distance to the hospital and also the reluctance of the kangany to part with his debtors, there was the problem of cost which the estate was bound to incur for the hospital treatment of the labourers. Moreover, even if the planter did see a labourer at the early stage of the illness, there was the problem whether he would, unskilled in medical matters as he was, be in a position to judge whether the labourer in fact required immediate hospital treatment or not. On discovering a sick labourer, the immediate reaction of those planters who kept medicine on the estate or the few who had estate dispensaries was to treat the sick on the estate.[61] But this "paternal attitude" depended primarily on the whims of the planter. Further, this attitude was undoubtedly

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58. Ibid., p. 5.

59. Ibid., pp. 9, 14, 19.

60. Ibid., pp. 5, 11, 22.
The problem of finding out the sick labourers was most difficult in seasons of "short work" on the estates. These were also the seasons when sickness among the labourers was on the increase due to bad weather.

61. Ibid., pp. 2, 6-7, 47.

on the wane in our period, for the planters asserted, not without justice, that the Government had taken over the management of the medical care of the labourers besides charging the planters with a levy.[62] The average planter normally made the kanganies responsible for taking the sick labourer to the hospital and it was only the most humane planter who took immediate steps to press for the removal of the sick.

The law no doubt provided for the prosecution of kanganies and planters for the evasion of their duties. Table 7.1 which sets out the available evidence on the breaches of the Ordinance and the number of prosecutions reveal that prosecution was resorted to only on a minor scale though the breaches of the law were in fact numerous. Besides, the prosecutions against the planters appear to have been confined to the violation of the relatively insignificant clauses of the Ordinance and the violations of those clauses which had a greater practical bearing on the health of the labourers appear to have been overlooked.

The Colonial Office repeatedly questioned whether the extremly small proportion which the number of prosections bore to the number of breaches indicated any laxity in the administration of the law.[63] But the fundermental cause for that laxity was deeply rooted and appeared almost irremediable in the context. The prosecutions of the kanganies depended on the planters but the latter dependent as they were for the supply and the discipline of the labour force on these middlemen-overseers normally refrained from taking legal action against them. A leading planter pointed out that it was unreasonable for the Government to expect the planters to co-operate with the Government in prosecuting "... our own kanganies--the men, practically, whom we depend on for our labour supply."[64]

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62. Ibid., pp. 4-5, 17.
A. M. Ashmore, a member of the DHMC pointed out that, "In the old days we had a regular sick muster every day, ... but that has been abandoned since the introduction of the Medical Aid Ordinance". Ibid., p. 5.

63. S of S. to Gov., No. 250 of 16 August 1884, C.O. 54/554.
S of S. to Gov., No. 183 of 3 December 1885, C.O. 54/560.

64. Annual general meeting of PAC, 17 February 1887, PPAC 1888, p. 28.

TABLE 7.1 Available evidence on the breaches and prosecutions under the Medical Wants Ordinance No. 17 of 1880

Clause of Ordinance	1883		1884		1885	
	Breaches	Prosecutions	Breaches	Prosecutions	Breaches	Prosecutions
Clause 20. Planters' failure to						
(a) maintain sanitary conditions of lines	1120	1	2209	nil	1272	nil
(b) inform himself to illness and taking relief measures	424	2	200	nil	151	nil
(c) send sick labourers to hospital when required by Medical Officer	49	nil	1	nil	nil	nil
(d) call Medical Officer in serious cases	1624	10	74	nil	151	nil
(e) inform Medical Officer about births and deaths	971	1	115	6	165	nil
(f) keep a register of labourers employed and also of births and deaths	7936	nil	158	2	552	nil
(g) supply post-natal food and lodging	nil	nil	3	nil	nil	nil
Clause 21. Kanganies' failure to report cases of sickness in the gang	661	41	274	6	701	27
Total	13889	55	3074	14	2992	27

Sources: Gov. to S of S., No. 259 of 9 July 1884, enclosure, Report on the working of the MWO during 1883, C.O. 54/554. Lt. Gov. to S of S., No. 90 of 9 September 1885, enclosure, Report on the working of the MWO during 1884, C.O. 54/560. AR of PCMO, CAR 1885, p. 139D.

The prosecution of the defaulting employers was hindered by several practical problems. The Superintending Medical Officers on their rounds of inspection of estates had necessarily to be guests of the planters. The consequent situation was described by the Principal Civil Medical Officer as follows.

> The Medical Officer who has (most improperly in my opinion) been compelled to accept the odium and responsibility of becoming a public prosecutor is dependent on the planter for his nights lodging; in many cases planters have even under the present system refused to entertain the Medical Officer, but owing to the leniency with which the law has been enforced the better disposed among the planters have hitherto provided accommodation, and this accommodation it would be impossible to obtain from any other source, as there are hardly any hotels or rest-houses in the coffee districts. It cannot be expected that the planters should offer, or Medical Officers should accept hospitality when the not improbable result of the visit will be that the guest should take out a summons against his host.65

Besides, the slim prospects of obtaining convictions discouraged the medical men from taking cases to courts. It was found extremely difficult to marshal evidence either from the kanganies or from the labourers who were under the strong influence of the planters. The labourers frequently contradicted their own evidence. Consequently, even in those cases which were taken to courts, the verdict was either a nominal sentence or an acquittal. This outcome, as the Principal Civil Medical Officer pointed out, was "... far from being deterrent... is an incentive to disregard it (the law)" and "... does not tend to encourage the policy of increasing largely the number of prosecutions". Of the total of 135 cases instituted between 1883 and 1888, there were 48 acquittals while the convictions "... were hardly in a single instance such as to be deterrent".[66] There was also the fear that any attempt at rigorous enforcement of the law would incite intense hostility from the planters and would eventually disrupt the entire medical scheme--a view shared by the Governor himself.[67] The planters were in a position to disrupt the medical scheme by combining

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65. PCMO to Edward Wingfield, Under S of S., 30 July 1888, C.O. 54/581.
66. Ibid.
67. Ibid.

themselves to make numerous calls, all at the same time, on the District Medical Officer to visit the estates or by flooding the hospitals with sick labourers. Some hostile planters did, in fact, at times adopt the first course. Besides, the medical staff in the planting districts was inadequate. They were heavily tied down to their medical duties and it was difficult without jeorpadizing their medical duties for them to frequently attend the law courts which would have been necessary if prosecutions were to be earnestly carried out.

The ultimate result of the overall situation was that the medical men took care not to take all cases of breach of the Ordinance before the courts. From among the cases submitted by the Superintending Medical Officers, the Principal Civil Medical Officer selected a few cases for prosecution--a system which he himself later described as "... invidious, unjust and unsatisfactory to the highest degree", but a system he was compelled to undertake on the grounds of expediency because of the impossibility of prosecuting all the cases of breach of the law.[68]

By 1887 both the Principal Civil Medical Officer and the Attorney-General had realised that it was useless to prosecute because the law could not be adequately enforced even when the planters were guilty of the worst abuses. Their reaction to the following two cases illustrate their attitude. In 1887, Dr. H. Thornhill, a Superintending Medical Officer, on one of his rounds of inspection reported regarding one estate that

> ... the whole of the lines are utterly unfit for human habitation, owing to the filth and unsanitariness .... I must refer to the note made by me in my report no. 93 of 1st June 1886. Neither Mr. Hornby (superintendent) nor Carenpulle (kangany) were prosecuted so far I know and to this I attribute the present still worse sanitary condition of the lines. I have no alternative but to recommend presecution at once.[69]

Again, regarding another estate the same Officer wrote that he had for

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68. Ibid.

69. Gov. to S of S., No. 125 of 14 March 1888, enclosure III, C.O. 384/168.

5 years reported the insanitary conditions of the "lines" and recommended prosecution but that his recommendation had not been carried out and as a result the sanitary conditions of the "lines" had become worse. He concluded that the "... state of the lines is now disgraceful and dangerous, and I again recommend a prosecution".[70] The Principal Civil Medical Officer agreed that these statements were perfectly accurate but he and the Attorney-General refrained from undertaking any prosecution.

Finally, in 1887, the posts of the Superintending Medical Officers had to be abandoned and with it went practically the entire system of estate inspection by medical men. The main reason was the opposition of the planters. The planters had throughout resented the presence of the Superintending Medical Officers on the estates as "inspectors of nuisance".[71] The latent hostility of the planters erupted into virtually open warfare with the publication of the reports of estate inspection for the year 1885. The most energetic of the Superintending Medical Officers, Dr. Griffin, referring to a case of neglect of a sick female labourer who ultimately succumbed to death, wrote that it appeared that "... apathy, if not neglect on the part of the superintendent, was present in this case".[72]

It was unfortunate for the Superintending Medical Officers that Dr. Griffin directed the above criticism against Abbotsford estate owned by A. M. Ferguson, the son of the most powerful press magnate of the day.[73] The entire wrath of the pro-planter press animated with personal indignation fell on the Superintending Medical Officers and the Principal Civil Medical

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70. Gov. to S of S., No. 125 of 14 March 1888, enclosure III, C.O. 384/168.

71. A general meeting of PAC, 17 October 1885, PPAC 1886, pp
Annual general meeting of PAC, PPAC 1887, pp. 6-13.

72. Report by PCMO, CAR 1885, p. 144D.

73. Fergusons owned the Observer which was the leading group of newspapers and journals in the Island at the time.

Officer.[74] The planters saw in the issue a way out to end the irritating presence of the Superintending Medical Officers. The local press, speaking for planters, called for the removal of Drs. Griffin and Thornhill; and the Planters' Association resolved that it saw "... no prospect of effectual co-operation ..." with the inspecting officers in carrying out the Medical Ordinance.[75] They pointed out, not unreasonably, that the appointment of three well qualified and highly paid European medical men solely for estate inspection was a waste of money and medical skill at a time when more medical men were required for the medical treatment of the labourers. The planters unanimously called for the abolition of the posts of the Superintending Medical Officers and suggested that the work of inspection of estates be handed over to the District Medical Officers--a move which, as an Under-Secretary in the Colonial Office noted, was bound to practically put an end to the system of estate inspection because the resident District Medical Officers had little time besides their medical duties to itinerate inspecting "coolie lines".[76] But in the face of unanimous opposition and avowed non co-operation of the planters it was useless to retain the Superintending Medical Officers. Governor Gordon himself felt that the system of inspection of estates by these Officers was too costly; and as far back as 1884 he wrote that "a reconsideration of the system is necessary to cut down costs".[77] Besides, Gordon had his own misgivings on the efficacy of the entire medical arrangement of 1880-2 and was himself thinking of remodelling the structure. He conceded to the demands of the planters and scrapped the posts of

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74. Series of editorials in COO in 1886. For instance, see the editorial of 6 November 1886.

75. Gov. to S of S., No. 375 of 6 September 1887, enclosure I, Resolution adopted by PAC, C.O. 54/572.
Annual general meeting of PAC, 17 February 1887, PPAC 1888, pp. 35-44.

76. Gov. to S of S., No. 375 of 6 September 1887, Minute by C. P. Lucas, C.O. 54/572.

77. Gov. to S of S., No. 259 of 9 July 1884, C.O. 54/554.

of Superintending Medical Officers. But once the immediate excitement over this particular issue quietened down he was soon involved in drafting a fresh medical welfare ordinance.

3. The attempts at reform, changes of 1893, and the aftermath

In 1889, Gordon submitted his draft bill with a view to change the basis of the 1880-2 medical scheme. Gordon was one of the strongest critics of the existing arrangement. He never found the system working satisfactorily and as early as 1887 he wrote

> ... I have long entertained doubts as to the expediency of maintaining in force the existing legislation with regard to the medical treatment of Indian immigrants ..., and that I find these doubts only grow and strenghten with the lapse of time, and the aquisition on my part of greater knowledge and experience of the system. I believe that the time is not far distant when it will be found necessary to reconsider the Ordinances which relate to it.78

In the following year Gordon made his views clear to the Colonial Office and the Legislative Council.[79] He attacked the existing arrangement as one exciting great irritation without effecting good results, sufficient to compensate for the friction caused. The scheme had worked imperfectly and its provisions had not been fully observed. Gordon felt that it was inequitable for the Government to devote more care and attention to the immigrant plantation workers without adequately fulfilling its duty towards the rest of the population in the country. His idea was to abolish the existing Ordinance and introduce a new scheme with a view to increase the medical aid available throughout the Island "... by a law of far wider application making provision for the medical care and sanitary condition of the entire population in the Island".[80] The Colonial Office wholeheartedly

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78. Gov. to S of S., No. 375 of 6 September 1887, C.O. 54/572.

79. Gov. to S of S., No. 125 of 14 March 1888, C.O. 384/168. CLC, Governors' Addresses, Vol. III, 31 October 1888, pp. 284-288.

80. Ibid.

agreed with Gordon on the need for a new approach.[81]

Gordon's draft Ordinance proposed a general medical scheme covering all classes of agricultural labourers on monthly contract, both immigrant and indigenous, working in estates under any type of cultivation.[82] The export levy was to be abolished. The employer was to pay at the rate of fifty cents per day for each sick labourer treated in the hospital and twelve and a half cents for each attendance of a labourer in a dispensary including the cost of medicine. The cost of construction and extention of hospitals was to be equally shared by the Government and the planters and the latters' share was to be collected on an acreage assessment of cultivated land in each estate. The obligation of the employer to send to the hospital or dispensary any labourer appearing to him to require medical treatment was made absolute and unconditional whereas in the existing system the obligation was made subject to the willingness of the labourer to go to the hospital. The rest of the duties of the planters and the kanganies remained practically the same as under the old scheme. The estate medical visits were to be abolished and the treatment of the sick was confined to the hospitals and the dispensaries.

The financial arrangement in the draft Ordinance was acceptable to the planters. The Government had modified its stand on the fundermental liability of the planters for the medical care of the labourers. Contemporary estimates predicted that under the new financial arrangement the planters would pay less than under the existing scheme. The planters, however, opposed the clause which made it compulsory for them to send the labourers to the hospital and also the abolition of the estate medical visits.[83] The planters had, in the past, found the estate medical visits

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81. S of S. to Gov., No. 253 of 13 August 1888, C.O. 384/168. C.O. felt that the MWO had become a dead letter. Ibid., Minute by C. P. Lucas.

82. CH 1889-90, 23 May 1890, p. 184.

83. A general meeting of PAC, 8 August 1890, PPAC 1891, pp. 86-90.

useful and economical. It was possible to get a whole batch of sick labourers treated on a single visit of a medical man. Besides, the system enabled the sick planters to obtain medical treatment on the estates without themselves having to undergo the trouble of travelling a long distance to the hospital. The Government conceded to the first request and agreed to subject the obligation of the employer (of sending the labourer to the hospital) to the willingness of the labourer to go to hospital. But Gordon insisted on the abolition of the estate medical visits on the ground that such visits would amount to a special privilage to the tea, coffee, and cocoa estates under a general medical scheme meant for the entire labour population of the Island.[84]

While the bill was half way through the Legislative Council Gordon was replaced by Sir Arthur Havelock as Governor. On the controversial question of the estate medical visits the new Governor was influenced by the local officials, especially the Principal Civil Medical Officer who insisted that the medical officers would be relieved of the estate visits, which would leave them with more time for hospital treatment. Havelock sought a way out of the impasse by suggesting that while the medical visits be kept out of the Ordinance, the planters should be at liberty to privately arrange with the medical men to visit the estates on the payment of a fee.[85] The planters, however, steadfastly stuck to the demand that provision should be made in the law for such visits.

On the whole, Havelock, having recently assumed the governorship, was not keen to entangle himself in such a thorny problem as the medical welfare of the labourers. He agreed with Gordon on the need for wider medical facilities but felt that the draft Ordinance did not go far enough to meet satisfactorily this demand.[86] Havelock wished for more time and

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84. CH 1890-91, 5 November 1890, pp. 26-27.
Gov. to S of S., No. 480 of 30 November 1890, C.O. 54/590.

85. CLC, Governors' Addresses, Vol. IV, 15 October 1890, p. 9.

86. Gov. to S of S., No. 480 of 30 November 1890, C.O. 54/590.

opportunity to enquire and observe the working of the existing medical arrangement. His wish was not unreasonable, for the times were changing with the revival of the prosperity of the plantation sector. There was the likelihood, as Havelock saw, of a subsidence in the weaknesses of the existing arrangement with the progress of prosperity. Havelock was therefore willing to drop the draft bill if such a step was acceptable to the planters.[87] The planters themselves preferred to maintain the status quo than let the estate medical visits be abolished under a new scheme.[88] The bill was accordingly withdrawn and the attempt at reforms ended in a fiasco.[89]

But the episode is significant in revealing the development of a new attitude among the planters towards the existing medical arrangement and its financial basis--an arrangement which they had assiduously opposed less than a decade ago. Their opposition to the export duty was no longer to be seen and in fact the planters' representative in the Legislative Council argued that the duty was "... in theory objectionable--in practice it is not felt and it is easily collected."[90] The change in the attitude of the planters can be explained on three grounds. First, the growth of the tea industry and the remunerative tea prices enabled the planters of the early 1890s to view their problems in different a light than during the years of the depression. Secondly, there was the Colonial Office view that Ceylon tea was asserting a monopolistic position in the British tea market and that this meant that the export duty was in fact paid by the consumer. Fairfield, at the Colonial Office, minuted that

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87. CH 1890-91, 5 November 1890, p. 26.
Col. Sec. to Sec. of PAC, 22 October 1890, PPAC 1891, Correspondence, p. ciii.

88. CH 1890-91, 5 November 1890, p. 26.

89. Ibid., p. 32.

90. Ibid.
Editorial, CCO, 27 April 1888.

> Explanation for the novel indifference of the planters to the Export duty is probably that "Ceylon Tea" has acquired a monopoly value in the market, and that as a consequence the duty falls on the English consumer. Whilst Ceylon tea was competing on equal terms with other teas this would have not been the case. 91

Thirdly, those features of the 1880-2 medical scheme which were objectionable to the planters had disappeared by 1890 and the scheme itself had therefore become acceptable to them.

Nevertheless, the status quo could not go on. The high hospital mortality among the immigrant labourers persisted and the Colonial Office was not ready to let things continue under the circumstances. Besides, the Colonial Office had backed Gordon's reforms to the hilt. It now gave into the unanimous decision of the Colony to shelve the bill, but on the clear understanding that Havelock would report further when he had time for inquiry on the subject.[92] But Havelock, deeply involved in spearheading the abolition of the controversial paddy tax paid by the peasants--the abolition of which was the most remarkable of Havelock's achievements in Ceylon--paid scant attention to the question of immigrant labour.[93] But the incessant pressure from the Colonial Office on the need for action to curb the high hospital mortality rate among the immigrant labourers led Havelock to appoint the District Hospital Mortality Commission of 1893 to investigate into the problem and recommend reforms.[94]

The Commission reviewed the working of the existing medical arrangement and in the process developed the guide-lines within which it was necessary to make its recommendations so that they may be acceptable and workable. First, there was the recurring problem of finance.

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91. Gov. to S of S., No. 480 of 30 November 1890, Minute by Fairfield, C.O. 54/590.

92. S of S. to Gov., No. 30 of 30 January 1891, ibid.

93. Havelock sent the Hospital Returns of 1890 and 1891 without any comment on the working of the MWO.

94. S of S. to Gov., No. 167 of 23 May 1892, C.O. 54/600.

The planters had settled down to the export duty and were not prepared to bear substantial additional cost.[95] Though the planters of the 1880s recouped a part of the labourers medical expenses with the profit on rice issued to them, during the years 1892-3 when the Commission was sitting, there was an abnormal increase in the price of rice anda consequent loss to the planters. They emphasised this loss to avoid additional taxation. The Colonial Government having settled down to meet an annual deficit of nearly one-third of the estate medical bill out of the general revenue was not prepared to burden the treasury with further substantial expenses on this accord. Besides, the total bill itself was increasing and was bound to increase further with the increasing inflow of immigrant labour consequent on the progress of the tea industry. Thus, economy became a primary guide-line of the Commission.

Secondly, there was the fundermental problem of how to remedy the situation under which the bulk of the labourers entered the hospital in a moribund condition which naturally augmented the rate of hospital mortality among them. The basic weakness of the 1880-2 medical scheme was the lack of satisfactory medical treatment for the labourers within easy reach of the plantations at the early stage of their sickness. In formulating the 1880-2 scheme, the Government had expected that need to be met by the planters but did not make any legal provision to that effect. In fact, Longdon's view had been to evolve an overall scheme where the "paternal system" of medical treatment on the estatesby the planters for simple ailments would work in combination with the central hospitals and dispensaries attending to the major cases. But while the latter facility was inadequate, the former was almost extinct in most estatesin 1880s. It befell on the Commissioners to suggest a scheme to fill this void.

To meet both guide-line, the Commission recommended in addition to the existing hospital complex a system of estate dispensaries whereby

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95. DHMC, Proceedings, Cey. SP II of 1893.

an estate or a group of estates would set up a dispensary and employ a dispenser paid by the estate or the group, and the medicine and equipment for the dispensary would be supplied by the Government out of the Medical Aid Fund. Therefore, the cost was to be divided between the Government and the planters.

The planters objected to the Commission's ideas and reiterated their view that the entire cost should be met out of the general revenue. But their opposition to the financial arrangement underlying the 1893 Dispensary Scheme was nothing like the scale of their campaign in the 1880s and it went on record merely as a dissident voice. The Dispensary Scheme was accepted by the Government and the Colonial Office; and the planters eventually became reconciled to it.[96] The low cost of the new scheme, the changing times in the plantation agriculture, and the realisation of the need for some arrangement for the early treatment of the sick were the decisive factors. Besides, the system of dispensaries had been already experimented in a few estates by several humane planters and had been found to work satisfactorily.[97] The system had the merit of early medical attendance by a medical man, though semi-skilled. The dispenser was expected to treat the simple cases and despatch those cases which required proper medical treatment to the hospital before the sickness became serious. The system also met the labourers' grievance of distance and their prejudice of being cut off from their relatives. In approving the scheme, the Colonial Office made two additional recommendations, viz., the improvement of ambulance appliances to transport the sick labourers to the hospitals and the appointment of visiting committees of planters for district hospitals.[98] Both suggestions were accepted by the Colonial Government.[99]

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96. Gov. to S of S., No. 378 of 5 November 1893, C. O. 54/610.
S of S. to Gov., No. 329 of 8 December 1893, ibid.
97. DHMC, Proceedings, Cey. SP II of 1893, pp. 2, 20. 47.
98. S of S. to Gov., No. 329 of 8 December 1893, C.O. 54/610.
99. Gov. to S of S., No. 287 of 7 August 1894, C.O. 54/616.

The period up to 1893 saw a rapid growth of the number of estate dispensaries. The increasing prosperity of the plantation sector and the heavy demand for labour were the basic factors. In the context of competition for labour between estates, especially at the peak crop seasons, the estates with better medical facilities found it relatively easier to attract labour. Besides, the estate dispensers relieved the busy superintendents of the trouble and time of personally attending to the sick labourers.[100]

There were several defects in the working of the estate dispensary scheme. It was found difficult to get the services of suitably qualified dispensers especially at the low rates of wages paid by the estates.[101] Besides, there were frequent complaints about the inadequacy of medical supplies in the dispensaries. Medicine in the dispensaries was confined to the barely elementary ones and often only to quinine. Nevertheless, the estate dispensary scheme was a big step forward.

In the District Hospital Scheme the period after 1893 witnessed further improvements. The planters themselves clamoured for new hospitals and the expansion of the existing ones. The number of hospitals available for the treatment of the immigrant plantation labourers increased from 26 in 1893 to 39 by 1910. The existing hospital buildings were renovated and extended. The medical staff multiplied from 47 in 1893 to 102 by 1910 and the total medical bill trebled during the same period.[102]

It is not possible to find out how far the planters and the kanganies co-operated in sending the labourers to the hospitals in the years after 1893. Available evidence does not show any appreciable increase in the number of sick labourers treated in the hospitals in proportion to the increase in the absolute size of the labour force on the plantations. On the other hand, the availability of dispensaries to treat the sick

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100. DHMC, Proceedings, Cey. SP II of 1893, p. 19.

101. Cey. Sab. Lab. Com. 1915, para 36.

102. See Table 7.3.

at the early stage of their illness would have abated the need to resort to hospital treatment. However, even in 1906 it was found that a large number of labourers died without having been seen by medical men especially in the low-country planting districts.[103] There is nothing to show that the evil influences of the wage system and the kangany declined in any appreciable measure. On the contrary, casual evidence only points towards a further strengthening of these influence in the years after 1890.[104]

The problem of inadequacy of the medical facilities persisted and most of the hospitals in the plantation districts continued to be over-crowded. These problems , however, were less acute in the up-country tea plantation districts than in the low-country rubber plantation districts of Kalutara, Kegalle, and Ratnapura. These latter districts were effectively opened up for planting only with the growth of the rubber industry after 1904. The climate of the low-country with its heavy rainfall together with the fact that the rubber estates were new clearings carved out of the forests made the low-country planting districts unhealthier than the up-country districts.[105] The medical aid programme which was hitherto, by and large, concentrated in the up-country districts had therefore to be extended to the newly opened up low-country districts.

Besides, the medical welfare facilities were not sufficiently far-reaching as to manifest themselves in the available vital statistics on the health of the labour population.[106] The hospital death rates did not show a marked downward trend. The increase in the medical facilities could not out pace the increasing tide of immigration and the growth of the plantation labour population in the period from 1890 to 1910. The per capita expenditure on the health of the labourers appears to have

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103. Mortality on Estates in Matale, Kurunegala, and Kelani Valley Districts during April to August, 1906, Cey. SP LVI of 1907.

104. The rise in cost of living, static wage rates, and the strengthening of the kangany's hold over the labourers due to indebtedness in the years 1890-1910 meant more pressure on the workers to turn up for work.

105. Editorial, COM, 11 January 1907.
AnR of Morawak Korale DPA for 1906, ibid., 6 February 1907.

106. See Tables 6.1-6.3.

TABLE 7.2 Medical Aid Budget: Revenue and Expenditure, 1883-1910

Year	Total expenditure	Government share
1883	134,032	104,002
1884	118,614	20,202
1885	132,439	31,719
1886	138,274	51,402
1887	148,859	53,150
1888	160,270	61,643
1889	176,568	77,817
1890	170,507	58,813
1891	185,567	55,932
1892	224,798	89,643
1893	273,767	119,756
1894	289,553	136,350
1895	306,839	135,947
1896	361,736	138,070
1897	374,939	139,944
1898	423,773	165,096
1899	514,690	253,294
1900	591,766	264,543
1901	617,205	308,282
1902	518,615	178,970
1903	523,164	196,628
1904	538,007	210,235
1905	576,044	168,617
1906	631,208	233,407
1907	623,080	238,328
1908	631,387	255,461
1909	716,531	326,171
1910	1,084,927	473,294

Source: ARs of PCMO, (series 1883-1910), CAR.

TABLE 7.3 The progress of medical welfare facilities for plantation labourers, 1884-1910

Year	District Medical Officers	Medical Assistants	District Hospitals	Civil Hospitals	Government Dispensaries	Estate Dispensaries
1884	N	N	6	8	N	N
1885	N	N	6	8	N	N
1886	8	17	6	8	28	N
1887	8	N	6	8	29	N
1888	N	N	8	8	N	N
1889	N	N	10	10	N	N
1890	N	N	10	10	N	N
1891	N	N	11	N	N	N
1892	15	30	11	10	23	N
1893	27	20	13	13	27	15
1894	28	28	13	13	34	33
1895	28	30	15	13	34	47
1896	26	30	15	12	N	66
1897	26	30	15	12	N	84
1898	25	28	17	12	N	96
1899	25	28	17	12	N	102
1900	25	28	17	12	N	103
1901	25	25	17	13	27	N
1902	25	28	20	13	29	117
1903	24	28	20	13	29	126
1904	24	28	20	13	29	131
1905	25	28	20	13	29	142
1906	25	28	20	13	29	143
1907	29	28	20	13	29	N
1908	29	62	21	14	29	N
1909	30	67	21	14	30	N
1910	34	68	21	18	29	N

Source: ARs of PCMO (series 1880-1910), CAR.

N:- No information available.

TABLE 7.4 Treatment of estate labourers under the medical welfare schemes, 1884-1910

Year	Number treated in hospitals	Number treated in Government Dispensaries	Number treated on estates by medical men
1884	3,450	N	N
1885	3,278	17,070	9,028
1886	3,317	16,095	11,785
1887	3,878	19,747	18,790
1888	4,212	26,883	33,005
1889	4,324	35,836	23,215
1890	4,584	38,448	30,342
1891	4,897	43,711	31,080
1892	6,727	46,959	38,993
1893	8,381	56,070	25,584
1894	7,636	65,929	39,156
1895	7,858	72,651	44,195
1896	8,754	72,167	40,234
1897	10,106	69,669	35,678
1898	12,140	76,096	43,547
1899	10,975	71,585	31,964
1900	11,967	74,990	43,567
1901	12,017	78,047	34,255
1902	10,995	44,726	17,344
1903	9,158	73,455	25,265
1904	8,299	38,987	10,527
1905	12,410	35,659	12,841
1906	18,427	43,753	17,157
1907	15,590	40,647	11,807
1908	17,091	70,605	34,169
1909	16,829	73,320	34,659
1910	26,854	111,575	59,237

Source: ARs of PCMO, (series 1880-1910), CAR.

N:- No information available.

remained static. At best, the medical welfare programme appears to have maintained the vital statistics pertaining to the health of the labourers at a constant percentage rate in a period of heavy migration and a heavy growth of the plantation labour force. This, however, was a no mean achievement during a period when the labour force increased about four-fold. There were of course other contributory factors such as the closing of the North Road for labour migration, the inauguration of the Ragama Camp, and the systematisation of the quarantine procedure which helped to improve the health of the immigrant labourers. But the medical welfare programme had a wider impact on the labour force than these other changes.

To conclude, the period 1880-1910 witnessed a striking progress in medical welfare facilities in the plantation sector. From being virtually a private arrangement of the planters financed by themselves a comprehensive two-tier structure evolved--one under the complete management of the Government and the other under the planters and both jointly financed by the Government and the planters. Thus, a combined state-private scheme developed.

The planters' behaviour reveal a noticeable change in their attitude to the question of medical welfare during the 1890^{s}. Their vigorous opposition of the 1880^{s} to the export duty subsided in the 1890^{s}. Besides, they showed a greater concern for the health of the labourers by multiplying the number of estate dispensaries and by clamouring for more hospital accommodation. While the change in attitude was partly at least due to the disappearance of those features of the 1880-2 medical scheme which were disagreeable to them, the primary factors were the revived prosperity of the plantation sector and the increase in the demand for labour in the 1890^{s} as against the depression and the conditions of surplus labour of the 1880^{s}.

Nevertheless, the initiative came mainly from the authorities--the Colonial Government and the Colonial Office due to the concern for

improving the health of the labourers and the desire to make the planters face up to their obligation to a labour force imported by them primarily for plantation work. In the formation, the management, and the financing of the welfare schemes, the Colonial Government played an impressive role. As with labour recruitment, so also with the medical care of the labourers the role of the Indian Government was negligible.[107]

4. Public health

A notorious defect of the labour welfare schemes was the utter lack of provision to regulate the conditions of public health on the estates. We have already seen that the only scheme of Government sanitary inspection of estates inaugurated in 1883 with a view to draw the attention of the employers to the defects in the sanitary conditions of the "coolie lines" was abandoned after four years without achieving any good results due to the strong opposition of the planters.

Towards the end our period the question of public health in the estates came to the limelight again. The problem of insanitary conditions in the estates and their baneful effects had been repeatedly stressed for the past several years by the medical officers working in the plantation districts. However, the widespread interest in the question in the early years of the present century was largely due to the initiative of the Colonial Office. The revived interest in the question was part and parcel of the empire-wide interest taken by the Colonial Office on the question of public health of the labour population mainly in the British tropical colonies.[108] At the turn of the century it was realised by the medical advisers of the Colonial Office that anchylostomiases was widely prevalent in these colonies mainly due to the insanitary conditions under which the people lived. The realisation that the heavy incidence of this disease

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107. For the overall policy of the Indian Government towards labour immigration to Ceylon, see above, pp. 37-50.

108. Discussion on Sanitation in reference to Anchylostomiases in the Tropics, PRPAC, SP XV of 1910, pp. 6-15.
S of S. to Gov., No. 53 of 4 February 1909, ibid., pp. 16-17

had ill-effects on the growth and the efficiency of the labour population in the tropical colonies led the Colonial Office to press the Colonial Governments to bring about measures to improve the sanitary conditions of the labour population. Inspired by the Colonial Office and the local medical officers, the Colonial Government in Ceylon took up the issue.

The initial move of the Colonial Government was to draw the attention of the planters to the gravity of the problem and to encourage them to move voluntarily to combat the disease by improving the sanitary conditions in the plantations. A pamphlet was distributed among the planters recommending several remedial measures, viz., the proper disposal of excreta by the construction of latrines, the protection of legs and feet of the labourers, providing facilities for obtaining pure drinking water, and the segregation of all serious cases of anchylostomiases. The Government requested the planters to "... spend a little money to improve the conditions of their coolies..." in return for "... a more efficient labour force."[109] The response from the planters was, however, not favourable and the Principal Civil Medical Officer wrote that the leaflet

> ... was severely criticised and made fun of, but no action was taken by the planters (as far as I know) to improve the health of their labour force along any of the preventive lines indicated in my pamphlet.[110]

After the failure of the initial attempt to win the voluntary co-operation of the planters, the Government appointed the Committee on the Sanitation of Estates in 1907 to probe into the issue and recommend remedial steps. The Committee called for urgent improvements. It pointed out that some method for the disposal of excreta on the estates on sanitary principles was "... urgently necessary", and that the protection of water supplies and the soil from pollution would materially improve

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109. "The Disease Anchylostomiases ", PCMO to Co. Sec., No. 413 of 29 September 1906, enclosure 3, ibid., p. 916.

110. PCMO to Col. Sec., No. 153 of 8 February 1909, ibid., p. 15.

the sick and the death rates among the immigrant plantation labourers.[111]

The recommendations of the Committee were comprehensive. It called for the setting up of a legal sanitary authority over the estates to inform the employers about the rudimentary principles of sanitation especially on problems pertaining to pure water supplies, healthy "coolie lines" and general cleanliness. It made detailed proposals regarding the schemes for the disposal of excreta, for the supply of pure water, and improvement of drainage around "coolie lines". Finally, the Committee recommended that the District Medical Officers should be empowered to inspect the estates and that their recommendations for the sanitary improvement of the estates should be enforceable by law. Thus, it came to be increasingly felt that some sort of compulsion was necessary to get the employers to move in the matter of sanitation. The Principal Civil Medical Officer clearly revealed the attitude of the authorities when he wrote that "... nothing short of an Ordinance will force the hands of the employers to introduce latrines" for the use of their employees.[112]

The planters, however, objected to compulsion in the matter of latrines.[113] But Colonial Office pressure caused the Colonial Government to pass the Ordinances No. 9 and No. 10 of 1912 which provided for the sanitary inspection of the estates by the District Medical Officers.[114] The latter were also empowered to inspect the health of the estate population and recommend remedial measures to the employers to improve the general state of health on the plantations. Besides, the Government empowered itself to make rules to get latrines constructed and also to get the drainage near "coolie lines" and the water supplies improved. The working of these Ordinances lay outside the perview of the present study.

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111. Cey. Lab. Com. 1908, Appendix UU, p. 657.
112. PCMO to Col Sec., 8 February 1909, PRPAC, Cey. SP XV of 1910, p. 15.
113. Sec. of PAC. to Col. Sec., 27 May 1909, ibid., p. 19.
114. For the Ordinances, see C.O. 56/17, Ceylon Ordinances, 1910-1916,

5. Maternity and infant care

We have already seen that the only form of maternity care provided by the law of 1883 was for the employer to supply food and lodging for the mother for a period of 14 days after child-birth and to relieve her from estate work for one month unless a medical officer certified that she is physically fit to resume work any time before that period. But "... though she is not required to work for a month she gets no rice after a fortnight and consequently after that time she has to work or starve.[115] The Colonial Office therefore drew the attention of the Colonial Government as early as 1885 to the need to make it obligatory for the employers to provide food and lodging for the mothers for one month after child-birth.[116] But no immediate action was taken and it was only in 1912 that this recommendation found its way into the statute book.[117]

Infant health was a totally neglected aspect on the estates in our period. The hospital treatment on the estate bill under the medical welfare scheme was virtually confined to the labourers on the estate Check-roll. The only treatment which the infants were given by the Government medical men was when the latter were requested to visit the estate by the superintendent. Such visits were usually requested when the adult labourers were seriously ill on the estate and the occasions of such visits were made used of for showing the sick infants to a doctor.

As a result of the negligence of infant health and maternity care the rate of infant mortality was heavy on the estates. At time infants died on the estates even without the superintendent knowing about such occurrence. It was only towards the end of our period that there was even any casual discussions on remedial measures. But these did not bring about any decisive action and the rate of infant mortality continued to

115. Lt. Gov. to Sof S., No. 90 of 4 September 1885, Minute by C. P. Lucas, C.O. 54/560.

116. S of S. to Gov., No. 183 of 3 December 1885, ibid.

117. Clause 12 Ordinance No. 9 of 1912, Legislative Enactments, Ceylon, Vol. III, (revised, 1923).

swell throughout our period. Interest in the question revived when the entire estate medical scheme was reviewed in the years 1910-2. In the new Medical Aid Ordinance No. 9 of 1912 for the first time it was made obligatory for the employers to see that all estate children below the age of one year received proper care and nourishment.[118] The District Medical Officers were expected to undertake periodic inspection of all such children.

The gross negligence of the question of infant mortality by the employers was partly a reflection of the state of the plantation labour market. Labour gangs shifted between estates according to the machinations of the kanganies, Chetties, and the estate superintendents. The latter consequently had no abiding permanent interest in the labour gangs on the estates. Even on the estates where the gangs had become resident, the employers looked mainly to South India for the future supplies of labour and not so much to the off-springs of the of the gangs resident on the estates. The following comment was rare to come from a planter even as late as 1910. Referring to the high rate of infant mortality he pointed that

> It all depends upon that whether we get our labour supply in the future. A great drawback would be removed in solving the question of our labour supply if we could get over that.... We should not have had troubles if we had done that twenty years ago.119

The high rate of infant mortality was not only a source of misery; it was also a source of waste. But given the context of the labour market with its lack of an acute shortage of labour except periodically, the overall migrant character of the labour force, and the availability of a pool of surplus labour in South India from which the employers could draw additional supplies, the lack of an abiding interest in a question such as infant mortality is not surprising.

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118. C.O. 56/17, Ceylon Ordinances, 1910-1916.

119. Anchylostomiases Committee, Proceedings, FPRPAC, Cey. SP XXXI of 1910, p. 12.

6. Education

The available data on the facilities for schooling of estate children during the late nineteenth century is fragmentary. For the first time, in the years 1904 and 1905, two surveys were carried out respectively by the ex-Director of Public Instructions, S. M. Burrows and the Director of Public Instructions, J. Harward on the facilities available on the estates for the instruction of children. These surveys presented the following picture.

TABLE 7.5 Facilities for schooling of estate children, 1904-5

	1904	1905
No. of estates	1320	
No. of estates in the survey	725	898
No. of Government schools	2	2
No. of schools started by planters	5	58
No. of Mission schools	36	
Total No. of schools	43	60
No. of boys of schools going age	21,045	23,690
No. of girls of school going age		22,510
Total children of school going age		46,200
No. of boys attending schools	1,598	
No. of girls attending schools	167	
Total attending schools	1,765	

Sources: Report by S. M. Burrows, PRITCC, Cey. SP IV of 1905, pp. 7-13.
RCEEC, Cey. SP XXVIII of 1905, p. 11.

In the schools given in the above Table the children were instructed in reading, writing, and arithmetic in the vernacular up to fifth standard. Available evidence reveals that the attendance in these schools were, by and large, confined to the children of the kanganies and sub-kanganies. Apart from the above schools, rudiments of instructions were given to the children on a self-help basis by the literate older members of the community in classes held in the "coolie lines". In 1905, the planters

reported, in face of criticism that the education of estate children was being neglected, that such "line schools" were conducted in 299 estates either in the "lines" or in rooms provided by the estates. In 1904, Harward found that 7607 children out a total of 46,200 estate children of school-going age received instructions in the 60 registered and 299 "line schools".[120] However, it was found that in the "line schools" teaching was unorganised, spasmodic, and virtually useless. Besides, it was pointed out that these schools organised by the kanganies were virtually confined to the children of a particular caste or a gang of labourers and that children of a different gang or a caste were not permitted to attend. After a survey of the facilities available for the instruction of estate children, the Director of Public Instructions concluded in 1903 that there was hardly any proper educational provision for the children of the Tamil estate labourers.[121]

The impediments to the progress of literacy were manifold. There was the basic indifference to the question of education on the part of the illiterate immigrant labour community who migrated solely for the purpose of finding employment and returning home with some savings. The want of education was not seriously felt by them. The migratory character of the labour force was a major hindrance for the progress of education among them. There was also the economic restraint that the children on estates, especially those above ten years of age, supplemented the family earnings by participating in relatively light work such as tea plucking and weeding.[122] Regular schooling was therefore viewed as an interference with the wage earning potentiality of the family. The idea of evening schools was often tried but there was the practical problem of obtaining a satisfactory response from the children who were too tired to attend

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120. RCEEC, Cey. SP XXVIII of 1905, p. 11.

121. Quoted in A. G. H. Wise to Under-S of S., 2 May 1904, PEITCC, Cey. SP IV of 1905, p. 12.

122. See above, p. 192.

school at the end of their working day.

Nevertheless, in a relatively few estates where schools were maintained for a considerable period of time, and the time schedules so organised as not to interfere with children's estate work and where the labourers were encouraged to send their children to schools, the superintendent found a favourable response.[123] At any rate there was always an initial lack of interest among the parents and it was found necessary to run a school for some time and apply constant pressure, particularly at the initial stage to get the school going. Towards the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, however, there was general acknowledgement from the planting community that the response from the children was good where schools were available.[124]

The overall Government policy throughout the late nineteenth century was to leave the work of inauguration and maintenance of estate schools in private hands and confine itself to financial assistance to those schools which satisfied certain requirements stipulated by the Government in its Code for Aided Schools promulgated in 1870. This grant-in-aid policy explains the existence of a relatively larger number of mission and planter-run schools compared with the number of Government schools in the plantations. The grant -in-aid to estate schools was part and parcel of the overall Island-wide education policy of the Government. The Government, however, in view of the difficulties of obtaining continuous school attendance by estate children held out exceptionally liberal conditions for estate schools to qualify for grants. The Code for Aided Schools specified that in order to qualify for grants an estate

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123. Editorial, COW, 23 June 1903.
Delta, Hansteville, Mahadora, and Bloomfield estates cited in A. G. H. Wise to Under-S of S., 7 July 1904, PEITCC, Cey. SP IV of 1905, pp. 13-14.

124. CH 1906-07, pp. 72-74.

school should have a suitable class room and the elementary facilities for teaching, an average attendance of fifteen students for a period of three months, give instructions in reading, writing, and arithmetic in vernacular up to the fifth standard, and provide a session of three hours. Estate schools were not required to have certified teachers but only someone competent to teach.[125] Where these conditions were fulfilled, the grants were given on examination results; and a child qualified for a grant to the school if he had attended the school for three months and had made twenty-five attendances. It was acknowledged by the officials and the planters that if the aforesaid conditions were fulfilled, the Government grant was adequate for the school to pay its way.[126]

But the response to the grant-in-aid system was poor in the estate sector.[127] The Christian missionary societies made inroads into the estates but their efforts among the plantation labourers were minute when compared with their progress among the other communities in the Island. The missionaries aimed at evangalization and concentrated their efforts on the permanently resident population in the Island where they could hope for more lasting results than in the case of the migratory population on the estates. Furthermore, the activities of the missionaries in the estates were dependent on the whims of the planters, and the reception accorded by the latter was not always cordial. The Tamil Coolie Mission organised in 1854 to work in the estate sector depended on the planters for financial assistance especially at the initial stage of setting up schools during which the schools had to qualify for

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125. Code for Aided Schools, 1901, Cey. S XXIX of 1900, para 43. For the rest of the population in the Island, the Code laid down the following conditions to qualify for grants. An average attendance of 45 students for a period of 9 months; a certified teacher; session of 5 hours and 100 attendances for a period of 9 months for a child to qualify for a grant. On the estates where this last mentioned condition was fulfilled a child was eligible for a double grant.

126. Report by S. M. Burrows, PEITCC, Cey. SP IV of 1905, p. 6.
A. G. H. Wise to Under S of S., 7 July 1904, ibid., p. 14.

127. Gov. to S of S., No. 291 of 12 July 1904, PEITCC, Cey. SP IV of 1905, pp. 1-2.

Government aid. But throughout the nineteenth century, the Mission found only a feeble support from the planters and the Mission itself made very slow progress in our period.[128] But it stands to the credit of the missionaries that the mission schools on the estates substantially outnumbered those of the Government and the planters.

The response of the planters to the Government grant in-aid system was even weaker than that of the missionary societies. In fact, when the question of estate education came to be openly debated in 1903, the Governor discovered from the Chairman of the Planters' Association that the vast majority of the planters were not even aware of the facility afforded by the Government to encourage the establishment of estate schools.[129] A few liberal planters were, however, cognizant of the system of grants and did in fact make use of it to impart rudiments of reading and writing in the vernacular to the children in the estates. They were mainly the proprietor-planters who usually had a closer personal link with their labour force. The bulk of the superintendents were, however, absolutely indifferent to the question. In fact, they regarded any attempt at imparting learning among the labour community as an exercise that would be eventually inimical to the labour supply. A. C. Kingsford, the Chairman of the Planter's Association, wrote that "universal education has in England denuded the agricultural districts of labour and a too rapid spread of education among the same class in Ceylon, might bring about a similar result."[130]

Again, the planters feared that schooling would affect the amount of labour performed in the estates and they disliked children being

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128. Editorial, COW, 20 February 1907.
AnR[S] of the Tamil Cooly Mission (series published in WCO, COO, and COW).

129. Gov. to S of S., No. 291 of 12 July 1904, PEITCC, Cey. SP IV of 1905, pp. 1-2.

130. Chairman of PAC to Col. Sec., 30 July 1903, PPAC 1904, Correspondence, p. xxiv.
Proceedings of the East India Association, Asiatic Quarterly Review, January-April, 1904, p. 184.

taken away from the field.[131] It is no wonder therefore that the grant-in-aid system remained in cold storage as far the great majority of the planters were concerned. During the 1880[s] and 1890[s] neither did the Government make any attempt to arouse the planters from their lethargy.

The earliest widespread interest in the question of estate education began with the turn of the century and culminated in fresh legislation in 1907. These were years when the wider issue of the need for a comprehensive system of vernacular elementary education for the entire population in the country as a whole was seriously debated.[132] In fact, the legislations of 1907 covered urban, planting, and rural Ceylon. The interest in the education of estate children was therefore part and parcel of this wider issue. The question of estate education came to be drawn into the orbit of the wider issue primarily because of the interest desiderated on the plight of the estate children by an enlightened opinion of several individuals and organisations in London. Prominent in the movement in London were C. H. Schwann, Sir Mancherjee Bhowmaggree, Herbert Roberts, and G. H. Weir--all members of British Parliament, and A. G. H. Wise--an ex-planter from Ceylon.[133] They found support from the East India Association, the Aborigines Protection Society, the National India Association, and the Royal Colonial Institute.[134] The issue was repeatedly raised in British Parliament. The Colonial Office was lumbered with correspondence drawing its attention to the paucity of schools on the plantations and the need for fresh legislation to provide adequate facilities. Their motives were primarily humanitarian. Their objectives were restricted to providing simple and elementary facilities for the teaching of reading,

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131. Ibid., p. 186.
CH 1906-07, 5 March 1907, pp. 72-73.

132. Education in Ceylon, 1969, chaps. 42 & 43.

133. The moving spirit of the movement in London was A. G. H. Wise who had been a planter in Ceylon for about four years. His critics attributed his interest in the question of education in Ceylon to a personal motive to gain an appointment in the Ceylon Education Department.

134. Proceedings of East India Association, 7 December 1903, Asiatic Quarterly Review, January-April, 1904, pp. 181-187.
Journal of the Royal Colonial Institute, March 1904, No. 4.

writing, and arithmetic in the vernacular so that the new generation of labourers would be literate and thereby be capable of maintaining their own accounts with the kanganies and the Chetties without being subject to extortion. The protagonists of the movement pointed out that a bare knowledge of reading and writing would not encourage the labourers to give up their traditional occupation on the estates but that such a policy, contrary to the fears of the bulk of the planters, would contribute towards building up a healthy labour force.[135] Throughout the years from 1903 to 1907, the pressure groups in London succeeded in maintaining the issue in the limelight.

The pressure exercised by these groups found its way to Ceylon through the Colonial Office.[136] The latter felt that the pressure groups in London were concentrating on the relatively less significant issue of the education of the estate children than the wider issue of the need to disseminate literacy among the resident Ceylonese population. On the whole, the Colonial Office standpoint was that in the case of the children of the "... floating population... an average institution was sufficient in view of the prior claim of the Ceylonese."[137]

The immediate reaction of the Colonial Government to pressure from London was to seek the co-operation of the planters to provide wider facilities under the existing policy of grant-in-aid. Governor Ridgeway in consultation with the Chairman of the Planters' Association and the Director of Public Instructions thought that

> ... the facilities already offered under the Government code would suffice and would be more frequently used by the planters if the scope of the existing regulations were clearly explained.138

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135. This view was supported by a few planters. Editorial, COM, 9 March 1907.

136. S of S. to Gov., Telegram of 7 August 1903, C.O. 54/683.
S of S. to Gov., No. 33 of 22 January 1904, PEITCC, Cey. SP IV of 1905, p.

137. Gov. to S of S., No. 6 of 5 January 1906, C.O. minute, C.O. 54/699.

138. Gov. to S of S., No. 291 of 12 July 1904, C.O. 54/689.

All that the Government did at first was to distribute among the planters a circular setting forth the concession offered for estate schools under the existing arrangement.[139] This was the first serious attempt on the part of the Government to implement the grant-in-aid system in the estate sector. In the next year, the Government made a further concession of reducing the duration of the school session to qualify for a grant to two hours (for children above eleven years only). But these moves failed to exert any appreciable effect on the planting community.[140] Apart from the widespread indifference of the planters, the grant-in-aid system appeared to suffer from several shortcomings from the point of view of the planters. It involved an initial expenditure by the planters because the grant depended on the school fulfilling certain conditions. The employer had therefore to wait for a year or more before he got his initial outlay back in the shape of the grant and this too was uncertain, for the grant depended on the success of the school at examinations. Until such time as he got the grant, the planter had not only to provide building and furniture but also had to pay the teachers. For the first two or three years the grant was invariably small for the children had to make some progress for the school to obtain a higher grant. Besides, the grant was rendered precarious by the possibility that a whole gang of labourers including children might unexpectedly give notice and depart just before an examination was due to take place.

Within months of the Government's efforts to popularize the grant-in-aid system among the planters it became clear that the system would not find widespread support from the planters. The result was an attempt to search for alternatives acceptable to the planting community. And in this process it was discovered that the planters' non-co-operation was directed not only at the grant-in-aid system but at any scheme

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139. Circular dated 17 December 1903 issued by the DPI, Correspondence Re. Estate Schools, PPAC 1903-1904.

140. Report by S. M. Burrows, PEITCC, Cey. SP IV of 1905, p. 9.

meant to set up estate schools on the basis of the minimum requirements in the Government educational Code; and that compulsion was necessary to push the planters into action.[141]

The first of these alternative suggestions emanated from the Director of Public Instructions, J. Harward. He submitted a scheme with a view to cut down the cost to the planters by grouping estates and erecting a school in the centre of each group, with the estate providing the building and furniture and the Government bearing from the beginning a definite proportion of the cost of maintenance of the schools. But the suggestion suffered from the shortcoming that it did not pay due attention to the inconvenience of the children to attend group-estate schools which were bound to be at a distance from most of the "coolie lines". Besides, the scheme did not meet with the approval of the planters because it would obviously result in the children absenting themselves from the estate during school hours and a possible interruption of the amount of estate work performed by the children. Governor Blake himself eventually considered that group-estate schools would not work satisfactorily. The additional cost which the scheme held out for the Government no doubt influenced Blake's attitude.

The Governor's next move was to commission a special officer, the ex-Director of Public Instructions, S. M. Burrows, to go about in the estates, examine the requirements on the spot, and recommend a suitable scheme. Burrows felt that both the system of grant-in-aid schools and Harward's idea of group-estate schools were unduly costly to the Government and the planters and were also unsuitable to the circumstances existing in the estates. He suggested the extention of the low cost system of "line schools". Burrows argued that the "line school" was the type required for the estate labour community; that this self-evolved system might be benficially encouraged by judicious aid from the Government and the

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141. Gov. to S of S., No. 291 of 12 July 1904, C.O. 54/689.

planters. The idea of "line schools" did not find favour with the pressure group in London. However, Burrow's idea found support from Blake and the Colonial Office, the latter in addition favouring Harward's group-estate schools where such schools could be conveniently set up.[142]

No action was, however, immediately instituted on Burrow's report because the wider issue of venacular elementary education for the population of the Island as a whole was approaching towards a climax which found its manifestation in the appointment of a broad based Vernacular Elementary Education Commission to investigate and recommend reforms for the entire Island. The question of estate education was also placed under the purview of the new Commission.[143]

The Commission Report as far as the estate sector was concerned was a poralisation of the various views expressed on the subject during the two preceding years. The Commission enunciated three main principles as regard education of estate children. First, it recommended against "... any rigorous system of compulsory school attendance during fixed hours". The Commission held, not unreasonably, that the time was not ripe for compulsory education in the plantation sector, that such a step would be resented by the planters as well as the labourers. Throughout the debate on the education of estate children, the consensus of opinion both in London and in Ceylon was against compulsory education. Thus, the above recommendation of the Commission was well in keeping with the contemporary views of the planters and authorities.

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142. S of S. to Gov. No. 321 of 16 September 1904, Cey. SP IV of 1905, p.17.

143. RCEEC, SP XXVIII of 1905, on estate schools, pp. 10-13.
The Commission was composed of H. Wace, GA. NP; J. Harward, DPI; J. N. Cambell, ex-unofficial member of the CLC; R. H. Highfield, Principal, Wesley College (later his place in the Commission was taken by Rev. J. Cooreman, Vicar-General, Galle) and D. B. Jayatilaka, Principal, Ananda College.

Secondly, as regards teaching institutions, the Commission recommended a three-fold system, namely, the grant-in-aid scheme for large estates, the grant-in-aid group-estate scheme for groups of smaller estates, and "line schools on estates where the two above categories were not immediately feasible. Thus, the recommendation meant a combination of the original grant-in-aid policy and the systems advocated by Harward and Burrows. These were schemes hitherto approved either by the Colonial Government or the Colonial Office and there was nothing novel in the recommendations in this respect.

Thirdly, the Commission recommended a measure of Government interference to compel the planters to provide elementary facilities for the instruction of estate children and also for the Government to undertake periodic inspection of such facilities. This recommendation was the outcome of past experience which unmistakably revealed that any attempt to depend solely on the planters to provide educational facilities on a voluntary basis would not bring about overall satisfactory results--a view clearly expressed in the previous year by the Director of Public Instructions. He pointed out that he would not "... anticipate that a very large number of schools will be started voluntarily by individual planters."[144]

The above recommendation was the only new feature pertaining to estate schools in the Report of the Commission and that was also the only feature disliked by the planters. But the planters offered little or no resistence to this recommendation because the overall policy underlying the scheme recommended by the Commission was acceptable to them. They viewed compulsory education on the plantations with distaste and repeatedly argued that such a policy would seriously disturb the supply of labour. As the editor of the Ceylon Observer, Weekly Edition pointed out,

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144. Report on Estate Schools, by DPI, 10 March 1904, PEITCC, Cey. SP IV of 1905, p. 4.

compulsory education was "... far ahead of current planting opinion".[145] The planters were glad that the Commission had recommended the exemption of the estate children from compulsory school attendance which it recommended for the children of the rest of the population in the Island. Besides, though the estates were to compulsorily provide facilities for instruction, the Commission accepted the "line schools" as sufficient for this purpose. It pointed out that where

> ... local circumstances render such combination impossible or at any rate incompatible with the employment of children as workers it is sufficient if the planter encourages the work of classes held either in the cooly lines or in a room provided by himself for the purpose and sees that all children, so far as is reasonably possible, receive some instruction in such classes .... We think it extremely likely that when the matter is definitely placed in the hands of the planter the lines school on a large majority of estates will rapidly be replaced by arrangements under which instruction will be given in a more methodical manner and in better surroundings.... We consider then that the natural line of development is to encourage the grant-in-aid schools, but to accept the lines school as sufficient, leaving it as far as possible to the planter to make his own arrangements.146

Thus, while the estates were to provide facilities, the Commission accepted the basic idea that schooling should not disrupt child-labour on the estates. The organisation of schools was to be left in the hands of the planters and there was to be no formal inspection of the "line schools", though all estate superintendents were to be expected to maintain school attendance registers. On the whole, the Commission appears to have advocated a "go slow" policy towards the question of education of estate children.

Part V of the Elementary Education Ordinance No. 8 of 1907 devoted to legislation on estate schools is virtually a wholesale adoption of the scheme detailed in the Commission Report.[147] The object, as the

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145. Editorial, COW, 23 June 1903.

146. RCEEC, Cey. SP XXVIII of 1905, p. 12.

147. For pt. V, See Col Sec. to Sec. PAC, August 1907, PPAC 1907, Correspondence, pp. 143-145.

Attorney-General pointed out, was to provide a room and a teacher where the children can be taught to read and write. The planters were to compulsorily provide suitable buildings for schools and also provide teachers for the education of the children between the ages of six and ten years. Instructions were to be provided in reading, writing, and arithmetic in the vernacular up to the fifth standard in a daily session of two-hour duration. The teacher was not required to be qualified. The superintendents of all estates were required to forward regular returns to the Department of Public Instructions giving the number of boys and girls of school-going age on the estates, those attending schools, the the number of days the schools were held, the average school attendance, and a description of school buildings. Finally, where an estate failed to make a school available for the education of the estate children, the Government was empowered to step in, set up a school, and levy a rate on the estate to defray the cost incurred.

The immediate reaction of the planters was to extend the "line schools" because of the low cost and the absence of formal inspection of "line schools". Table 7.6 below compiled from the information available in the annual Administration Reports of the Director of Public Instructions reveals a gradual increase in the number of registered schools on the estates after 1908.

TABLE 7.6 The number of estate schools registered in 1908-10 under the Elementary Education Ordinance No. 8 of 1907.

Year	No. of schools
1908	162
1909	185
1910	227

Source: AR of DPI for 1910-11, CAR 1910-11, p. A16.

It is not possible to know the nature of the facilities provided in these schools. The Ordinance of 1907 is significant in that it remained as the basis of the estate school system up to 1947.[148]

To conclude, it was only towards the end of our period that a substantial step was taken to solve the problem of illiteracy among the estate children. Even if the limited scheme of 1907 was to produce results, these would have been felt only by the next generation of labourers. It could be safely concluded that a general state of ignorance and illiteracy pervaded the labour community throughout our period—largely the outcome of the conditions of the community from which they were drawn and the lack of adequate educational facilities on the estates.

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148. Education in Ceylon, 1969, p. 753.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

The period we have covered in this study was one of remarkable economic changes in the Island--changes which laid the foundation of the tea-rubber export economy of the Island. This economic expansion was brought about by foreign capital and enterprise, organised and managed mostly in the form of limited liability companies. These enterprises progressed under the protection and the administrative stability provided by the British imperial hegemony in the Island. The economic expansion was much the work of foreign labour as it was of foreign capital and enterprise. The response of the unskilled immigrant labourers to the employment opportunities in the plantations was striking. The trail had been already laid in the coffee era (1830-80). The increase in labour immigration and the preponderance of immigration over emigration in our period resulted in a heavy net gain to the Island's population. The estate population which approximated 200,000 in 1880 rose to approximately 475,000 by 1910, thus making the period one of the heaviest in the immigration of labour to the Island. More important, the immigrant labour population in the Island took more of a resident character in response to the regular and continuous demand for labour in the tea industry in contrast to the high seasonality of the labour demands of the coffee estates.

The rapid expansion of both tea and rubber took place under relatively favourable labour market conditions. The supply was unrestricted by the Indian Government unlike in case of most other countries which imported labour from India. The inflow was actively encouraged and assisted by the Colonial Government though it did not participate in labour recruitment directly. The most potent of the Indian economic

factors inhibiting the rapid flow of labour relatively good agricultural seasons--did not occur frequently in our period. In fact the unfavourable agricultural seasons were quite common; and at times created conditions of famine. The relative proximity of the Island to South India and the system of family migration helped the flow. The latter together with the kangany system of recruitment helped to minimize the influence of the social factors which operated in the South Indian society in inhibiting labour mobility. Because of the availability of a potential surplus of labour in South India, the planters concentrated on publicising working conditions, in intensyfing recruiting activities, and improving transport facilities for the labourers to get to the estates. To attain these aims, they set up the Ceylon Labour Commission, utilized the Tin Ticket System and also obtained concessionary rail fares for the labourers. All these factors contributed to increase the inflow.

The planters' main problems were the poor turn-out and the heavy turnover of the labour force. The problem of labour turn-out was fairly successfully tackled by the technique of making the estate issue of rice dependent on the weekly turn-out of the labourers and also by making the kanganies' 'head' and 'pence' money dependent on the turn-out of their labour gangs.

Instability and high labour turnover continued as the planters' major problem throughout the period. Basically, the problem of instability was closely interwoven with the immigrant plantation labour system in the Island. There was no indenture system in Ceylon. The labourers were on monthly contracts. The labour demands on the estates fluctuated seasonally. The planters required extra hands in some months of the year whom they could pay off at the end of the peak season. An extra pool of surplus labour for casual work during peak season would have been the ideal condition from the point of view of the planters. But

the bulk of the labour force, both casual and permanent, had to be imported at an expense of an initial outlay, and it was obviously uneconomical for the planters to maintain all such gangs on the estates throughout the year. The planters therefore evolved the "tundu system" to transfer gangs from estates with surplus labour to estates in short supply without themselves having to forego the outlay they had incurred in importing labour. But the "tundu system" eventually became the instrument of high labour turnover, largely because of the hold the kanganies and the Chetties had over labour gangs. They used their power and influence over labour gangs to shift gangs between estates to suit their own interests. Because the problem of instability was closely related to the labour system a radical change of the latter was necessary to tackle the former. But the problems poised by labour force instability did not turn out to be so critical as to persuade the planters to bring about a radical change in the system of recruitment and organisation of the labour force. The problem of labour instability was, by and large, confined to 2-3 months of the year and the plantations, on the whole, had an overall adequate supply of labour, except during the season of peak work load. Besides, those who were instrumental in bringing about seasonal instability on the labour force, viz., the kanganies and the Chetties, did otherwise play roles useful to the planters. The kangany was important in the recruitment and the management of the labour gangs. The Chettie was important as the main supplier of consumer goods of the labourers, besides being the sole "outside" financier of the labour force--a role which, in the peculiar context of the immigrant labour system in our period, virtually meant that the Chettie was in a sense contributing towards the working capital necessary to maintain the labour force.

The fundamental question arises as to how the planters suceeded in obtaining a large increase in immigrant labour so as to adequately

meet the overall heavy demand on the estates on a low and stagnant wage scale--a scale which turned out to dwindling in terms of the labourers' real income as the tea period progressed. This is the central question which ties up the two basic aspects of our study--the supply of labour and the labour conditions on the plantations.

The obvious explanation is that the immigrants found the level of living on the plantations in the Island superior to that in their villages in South India. The estates offered work for the family and also offered prospects of continuous employement. Besides, rice, which was the staple food of the economically better off sections of the population in South India, was regularly available to the labourers on the estates. While these superior attractions were basic factors for the general inflow of immigrants, this explanation leaves many questions pertaining to the immigrant labour market in the Island unanswered.

From the point of view of the labourers, the wages on the estates were inadequate to meet even the cost of their basic necessities, especially in the years after the late 1890s. Yet the labourers not only migrated in large numbers and subsisted on their earnings; they also indulged in gambling and consumption of alchohol and even remitted money to South India from time to time.[1] From the point of view of the planters, the question arises as to how they maintained an equilibrium between the demand and supply of labour on a stagnant wage scale.

The crucial fact is that the wage scale played a less significant role in the immigrant labour market of our period than the role it plays in the labour market of today. The role which the wage scale play in the latter was actually played by the "cash advances" in the case of the former. It was an "advances dominated" labour market than a "wage dominated" one.

Not only did the cash advances helped the planters to import labour. More important, advances made the labourers indebted to the

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1. The immigrant labour population appears to have been a main source of excise revenue of the Colonial Government.

estates and therefore gave the employers a hold over the labour gangs. A substantial portion of the advances turned out to be irrecoverable. But even so, they preferred to compete for labour with the offer of higher cash advances than with the outright payment of higher wages which ensured them no such hold over the labour gangs.

What did the system mean to the labourer?. The advances enabled him to bridge the gap between the low wages and the rising cost of living. But in return he got himself into debt-bondage. It was mainly in the months of peak work load on the estates that high advances were procurable from the estates. When estate advances were not forthcoming or were found to be inadequate, the labourers turned to the kangany and the Chetty for advances. Thus the system eventually placed the labourer in debt-bondage to a three tier monopolistic structure of the estate, the kangany, and the Chetty. Because the advances obtained from the kangany and the Chetty carried high rates of interest, the system deprived the labourer of a portion of his earnings which went to enrich his creditors. The working of the system therefore not only explains the debt-servitude and the absence of economic progress among the working class in a period of striking prosperity in the industry in which they worked; but it also helps to explain the rise of the Chetties and the Kanganies as economic élites in the plantation region. The labourers acceded to the set-up because they were drawn from the poverty-stricken and illiterate sections of the population in South India who were quite used to a life of indebtedness, which was repaid by them with their manual labour.

It was only the Governments--the Imperial, the Indian, or the Colonial--which could have brought about a change in the labourer's relationship vis-a-vis the employer, the kangany, and the Chetty. The policy of the Indian Government was one of non-interference towards the entire question of labour migration to Ceylon. In the context of the immigrant labour market in Ceylon this policy meant the total neglect

of the immigrant labourers. The Colonial Government and the Colonial Office steered clear of the strictly planter-labour industrial relations, except for a brief attempt in the mid-1880s. There was no legislation on aspects such as minimum wage rates, hours of work, and child-labour. Where some legislation was framed to cover the method of calculation of monthly wages and the method of wage payment, there was no adequate administrative effort to enforce the law. However, both the Colonial Office and the Colonial Government paid a substantial degree of attention into other aspects of plantation labour life, especially labour welfare measures and the method of conveyance of labourers. In these spheres, undoubtedly, some progress was seen.

The expansion of the plantation sector with foreign capital and foreign labour meant the growth of a foreign enclave in the Island. There was large-scale capital investment but there was less progress by way of capital formation in the Island. So also, while there was a heavy increase in the immigrant working class, their earnings apart from their expenses on basic consumer goods did not remain with them to raise their own standard of living on the estates. Being an immigrant population, such earnings went to South India either through the kanganies, the Chettiæs, or the labourers themselves. The Island's economic structure was changed by coffee, tea , and rubber plantation enterprises from a basically peasant subsistence economy to a dual economy. The planting sector sector contributed to the Colonial treasury by the payment of numerous taxes and duties. These sources of revenue enabled the Colonial Government to launch public works projects, particularly road and railway construction and port development. The immigrant labourers' share to the Colonial treasury came by way of the payment of the duty on imported rice, duties on other consumer goods, their contribution to the excise revenue and the rail freights. Due to the presence of a large immigrant population in the Island there was one main point at which the two sectors of the

dual economy could have got merged to bring about an overall composite economic growth in the Island. The immigrants who formed a truely landless proletariat created a huge market for certain consumer goods, particularly food-stuffs. But this market remained unexploited by the peasant agricultural sector in the Island and the heavy market, particularly for rice, came to be dominated by imports from India.

APPENDIX A

Total plantation labour immigration (men, women, and children) 1880-1910

	By North Road				By Tuticorin-Colombo Route				GRAND
Year	Men	Women	Children	Total	Men	Women	Children	Total	TOTAL
1880	16,580	3,737	537	20,854	N	N	N	N	20,854
1881	21,777	5,033	613	27,423	N	N	N	N	27,423
1882	21,071	4,858	649	26,578	N	N	N	N	26,578
1883	12,587	2,617	353	15,557	N	N	N	N	15,557
1884	16,240	3,701	610	20,551	N	N	N	N	20,551
1885	18,546	4,468	895	23,909	N	N	N	N	23,909
1886	14,085	3,371	637	18,093	N	N	N	N	18,093
1887	18,975	3,877	1,167	24,019	N	N	N	N	24,019
1888	40,011	9,998	1,829	51,838	N	N	N	N	51,838
1889	25,910	6,859	1,362	34,131	3,188	952	830	4,970	39,101
1890	29,121	9,657	1,923	40,701	8,915	2,718	3,388	15,021	55,722
1891	34,228	10,998	2,552	47,778	15,509	4,961	5,547	26,017	73,795
1892	31,751	10,696	3,186	45,633	21,583	7,381	8,344	37,308	82,941
1893	23,946	7,719	2,799	34,464	12,235	4,015	4,165	20,415	54,879
1894	20,636	6,154	2,272	29,062	12,864	3,936	4,291	21,091	50,153
1895	22,477	6,822	2,146	31,445	28,519	9,717	11,946	50,182	81,627
1896	20,229	6,234	1,818	28,290	36,135	11,906	12,457	60,498	88,788
1897	19,922	5,784	1,777	27,483	56,895	18,320	20,392	95,607	123,088
1898	13,477	4,348	1,595	17,420	43,007	14,943	15,868	73,818	93,238
1899	82	39	22	143	15,527	4,610	3,540	23,677	23,820
1900	North Road closed				73,604	28,041	27,073	128,718	128,718
1901					28,891	10,216	9,654	48,761	48,761
1902					21,447	7,182	5,132	33,761	33,761
1903					29,986	10,087	7,885	47,958	47,958
1904					38,762	12,684	10,028	61,474	61,474
1905					80,366	28,855	29,654	138,875	138,875
1906					52,199	18,693	18,053	88,945	88,945
1907					N	N	N	N	55,701
1908					53,730	20,078	15,172	88,980	88,980
1909					48,230	18,440	14,048	80,718	80,718
1910					N	N	N	N	118,613

Sources: ARs of AGA. Mannar District, (annual series, 1880-1900), CAR.

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N:- No information available.

APPENDIX B

Specimen "Tin Ticket", "Labour Federation Tundu", "Discharge Note", and "Kangany 'A' Form"

No.....

LABOUR FEDERATION OF CEYLON

TUNDU.

..... Estate.

..... 190 .

NAMES.

Labour Federation of Ceylon..

No..... ***TUNDU.***

..... Estate (Date) .....190 .

On.....day of..... 19.... Bearer ....

.....Kangany and.....Coolies will be paid off from the Estate on bringing Rs. .....(Rs. .....)

This note holds good until.....day of.....only. when it must be returned for renewal if necessary.

NAMES.

ADULTS.		CHILDREN.	
Males.	Females	Males	Females.

N. B.- If any Sinhalese are in the gang, the number and sex of these should be noted.

LABOUR FEDERATION OF CEYLON.

DISCHARGE NOTE.

No..... .....Estate

Date.....190

.....Kangany

and.....Coolies have this day been paid off the above Estate.

Signed..... .....

Manager.

LABOUR FEDERATION OF CEYLON.

DISCHARGE NOTE.

No..... .....Estate

Date 190

.....Kangany

and ....Coolies have this day been paid off the above Estate.

Signed.....

Manager.

A. FORM.

Estate..... ..... Post Office..... .....
Tin Ticket No..... Head Kangany.....
Date..... Sub-Kangany.....

The Ceylon Labour Commissioner, Trichinopoly.

Pay bearer..... .... Kangany or Cooly. Son of.....age.....
Caste..... .....Village.....
Taluk.....P. O.... ....District..... Rupees ....and Rupees..... for every cooly he brings, exclusive of rail fare and batta to the..... .... Agency.

Yours faithfully,

....

Superintendent.

APPENDIX C

Colombo wholesale prices of several consumer articles of the estate labourers

Commodity	1882	1883	1884	1885	1886	1889	1890	1891	1892	1893	1894	1895	1896	1897	1898	1899	1900	1901	1903	1904	1905	1906	1907	1908	1909	1910
Red onions	10.50	11.50	14.00	12.00	12.00	11.85	15.50	14.50	20.00	10.50	20.00	11.25	9.75	—	11.50	13.50	13.50	13.50	18.50	11.50	15.50	29.25	25.50	13.50	20.25	22.25
Dry chillies	32.50	37.00	42.50	45.00	35.00	46.50	66.00	52.50	52.50	60.00	—	52.00	43.00	70.00	77.50	65.00	86.00	77.50	72.50	71.00	81.00	87.00	61.50	81.50	113.50	101.50
Maldive fish	21.00	26.00	19.00	18.50	16.50	13.75	11.00	17.50	18.50	—	13.12	14.87	26.13	20.50	16.25	24.00	28.25	24.75	31.00	35.00	18.75	29.25	—	30.50	22.50	28.50
Coriander	19.50	30.00	32.50	—	15.00	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	50.00	37.50	35.00	33.00	22.00	30.00	43.50	57.50	39.50	34.50	39.50	77.50
Peas	—	8.50	8.00	7.12	—	—	9.44	8.42	7.80	7.18	7.43	7.19	8.25	8.57	8.00	7.57	8.75	8.13	8.88	8.00	8.00	9.00	10.25	9.44	17.38	9.75
Dry fish	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	10.75	11.50	—	10.00	11.25	7.25	11.00	10.75	10.25	12.00	10.50	—	—	—	—
Dal	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	11.13	9.00	9.25	6.88	7.25	9.43	7.94	8.38	7.38	9.13	11.13	11.63	13.25	9.43
Kerosine oil	—	—	—	—	—	4.15	5.12	4.35	4.75	5.12	5.37	6.87	7.37	5.50	5.75	6.75	7.63	6.85	6.20	6.25	5.98	6.09	5.78	6.45	6.12	7.18

Sources: Sarasavi Sandaresa (1880-1910)

Note: Price lists are not available for 1880-1, 1887-8, and 1902.

Unit of measurement—prices for red onions, dry fish, dry chillies, and coriander are for per parama (Sinhalese unit of measurement equal to two and half bushels).
prices for peas and dal are for per mutta (Sinhalese unit of measurement equal to 165 lbs.).
prices for maldive fish are for per cwt.
prices for Kerosine oil are for per box of two tins (8 gallons)

APPENDIX D

Total tea and rubber acreage 1880-1910

Year	Total tea acreage planted	Estimated tea acres in full bearing (5 years and upwards)	Total rubber acreage planted	Rubber acreage in bearing
1880	13,500	1,750		
1881	22,000	2,720		
1882	32,000	4,700		
1883	70,000	6,500		
1884	102,000	9,274		
1885	150,000	13,500		
1886	170,000	22,000		
1887	183,000	32,000		
1888	200,000	70,000		
1889	205,000	70,000		
1890	220,000	102,000		
1891	250,000	150,000		
1892	262,000	170,000		
1893	273,000	183,000		
1894	289,000	205,000		
1895	305,000	220,000		
1896	330,000	250,000		
1897	350,000	262,000		
1898	364,000	288,000		
1899	378,000	305,000		
1900	384,000	330,000		
1901	387,000	345,000		
1902	383,000	369,000		
1903	380,000	375,000		
1904	386,000	380,000	25,000	600
1905	390,000	378,000	40,000	1,000
1906	386,000	379,000	100,000	2,000
1907	390,000	382,000	150,000	2,500
1908	392,000	382,000	180,000	4,000
1909	395,000	383,000	184,000	5,500
1910	385,775	385,000	203,000	20,000

Sources: Ferguson's Ceylon Handbook and Directory, 1913-14.

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C.O. 56/series Ceylon Acts

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